

INSIDE: KUTTNER ON KRUGMAN

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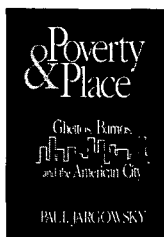
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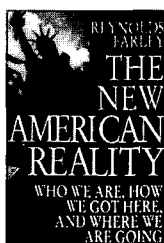
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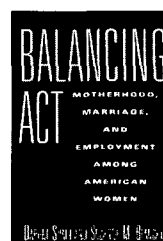
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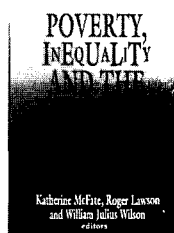
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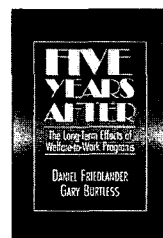
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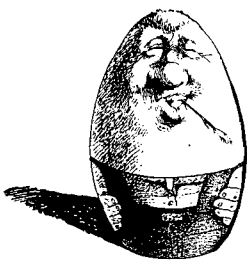
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Go register  
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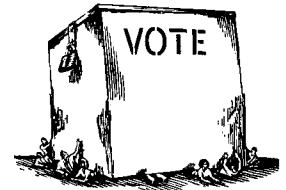
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Jacob Heilbrunn

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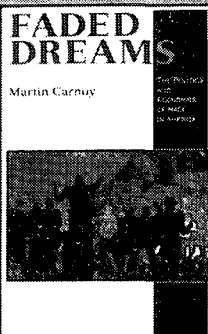
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**A** “neoprogressive revival”? The Republican congressional takeover of 1994 blocked a lot of the Clinton program, but most of the Contract with America didn’t pass either. In this issue, several articles anatomize what it will take to get progressive politics moving again. E.J. Dionne, Jr., reviews the extraordinary reversal of fortune of the past year and suggests some promising directions for the neoprogressive resurgence he predicted in his recent book *They Only Look Dead*. The pollster Stanley B. Greenberg suggests how progressives can connect their ideas to the experience of working Americans. And Theda Skocpol argues that liberals need to recover the true lesson of the GI Bill and address the needs of young adults, not just children and the elderly.

Elsewhere in this election issue, Marshall Ganz looks at the limitations of the Motor Voter act and wonders whether we will take the next step and give people a reason to vote. And Peter Schrag pursues the paradox of popular referenda in California. Initiatives return power to the people, only to make the people even more enraged about government’s failings—in part because it’s hamstrung by the very same initiatives.

Our cover story, by Isaac Kramnick and R. Laurence Moore, examines the role of the religious right in the 1996 election and the broader issue of separation of church and politics. There is an appropriate role for religion in public life, but allying religious activists with a single political party is a dangerous step—for religion as well as politics. Opponents of the Constitution accused the Founders of being godless, but religion has flourished in America precisely because of the breathing space the Constitution provided. Why the right doesn’t grasp that, only God knows.

—The Editors

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**Cover:** Taylor Jones

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PAUL STARR

# Damage Report

**T**he past two years have humbled both liberals and conservatives—or should have. The 1992 election, liberals hoped, would set in motion a new cycle of progressivism. It didn't. After the 1994 election, the new conservative leaders of Congress expected to stage a revolution. They didn't. First President Clinton failed to secure the bolder aspects of his program, notably health care reform and public investment; then the Republicans failed to enact most of the Contract with America and their seven-year budget plan. Clinton miscalculated on health care; the congressional leadership miscalculated on the government shutdown. Conservatives still have control of the national agenda, and they have won a big victory on welfare reform. But the collapse of public approval for Gingrich and the Congress—down to about 26 percent since January, according to a *Wall Street Journal*/NBC poll—has deflated their claim to a historic mandate.

Thus the 1996 election comes at a curious juncture. Juggernauts have been stopped, great ambitions set back, strategic calculations upset. Neither side goes into the election with any ideological momentum, but neither is in free fall. Liberals can say, "It's not what we hoped for in 1992, but not as bad as we feared in 1994." And conservatives can say, "It's not as bad as we feared in 1992, but not what we hoped for in 1994." For the moment, pending the outcome in November, each side can count more negative achievements than positive ones.

Two years ago, the public was supposed to be furious about gridlock in Washington, which must be why voters elected a congressional majority from the party opposing the President. Now many people have come to appreciate gridlock; it is evidently an acquired taste. If we cannot have our

preferred policies, we prefer stalemate to action, and thus the status quo becomes a second-best solution that commands more approval, or at least acceptance, than any alternative.

So is the lesson of the last two years simply that, as the Founders intended, rapid, large-scale change in national policy is exceptionally difficult? After a half term of Clinton and two years of the Clinton-Gingrich coalition government of national disharmony, is America any different? What have actually been the results of the past two elections?

**T**here have been significant results—some of them for the better. After the 1994 elections, Richard Rothstein compiled a list in these pages of "Clinton's Good Deeds: Or, 55 Reasons Why Liberals Should Have Cheered Clinton's First Two Years" [Winter 1995]. Surprisingly, most of Rothstein's items—such as the expansion of the earned income tax credit and restoration of tax progressivity with higher rates on the wealthy; gun controls; the National Voter Registration Act; the Family and Medical Leave Act; voluntary national service; California desert national park expansion; and a variety of actions protecting reproductive rights—still stand.

Of course, even during Clinton's first two years, the initiatives that required money, such as national service, were severely limited, and after the control of Congress shifted hands, Republicans were able to undo many of the changes in budgetary priorities that Clinton had introduced. Nonetheless, the surviving initiatives from the first half of the Clinton presidency make up a respectable, if not glorious, record and might have been seen as such if not for the overshadowing failure of health care reform.

From the outset, Clinton sacrificed more substantial spending initiatives for the sake of deficit reduction, and it is one of the cruel ironies of recent history that not only does he get no credit for it, but according to the polls, most people don't even realize the deficit has been cut in half. In fact, the U.S. deficit is now the lowest in relation to gross domestic product (GDP) of any of the G-7 nations, and if not for the high-minded demagoguery that dominates discussion of the budget, Americans might understand the progress we have

**W**hat have actually been the results of the past two elections?

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Much of what Clinton has achieved in the management of the federal government might also command more respect if so many people did not find the actual business of government so boring. Americans have supposedly been outraged by the kind of inefficiency symbolized by the Pentagon's mythical \$600 toilet seat of some years ago. In 1993, the Congress passed a major reform of federal procurement, and as part of its effort to "reinvent" government the Clinton administration has made personnel management more flexible, sought to shift the focus of regulatory agencies from rules to results, and introduced new information technology to make it easier for citizens to obtain services and information. But while \$600 toilet seats and petty scandals make great stories for "The Fleecing of America," the patient work of improving government is just too unexciting to make the news. I cannot say for sure that the federal government is, on balance, more efficient and responsive, but I am certain that there is no way Americans would have heard about it if it is.

**I**n its second two years, jockeying with the Republican Congress, the Clinton administration has necessarily been on the defensive—rather successfully from the standpoint of gaining political advantage. The results in policy have been more dubious.

Until this summer, the single biggest accomplishment of divided government in the Clinton-Gingrich era was the passage last February of the Telecommunications Act of 1996, the most important change in communications law in 60 years. Similar legislation was poised to pass the previous Democratic Congress—it received more than 400 votes in the House—when in late September 1994, Bob Dole presented several nonnegotiable demands on behalf of the regional Bell phone companies, killing the bill. Although the new Republican Congress rewrote key provisions, particularly those affecting the cable and telephone industries, the 1996 model that ultimately passed and received President Clinton's signature was philosophically unchanged.

Like its earlier incarnations, the final Telecommunications Act removes regulatory barriers to competition across the boundaries that have traditionally divided local and long-distance tele-

phone, cable, broadcasting, and newly emerging media. It allows larger consolidations of communications companies (particularly of broadcasters) than before. And it provides a continued regulatory basis for universal telecommunications service—indeed, it begins extending the concept to the new information superhighway. As I've noted in these pages ["Computing Our Way to Educational Reform," *TAP*, July-August 1996], the legislation for the first time makes "affordable" telecommunications connections for schools and libraries an aim of national policy. It also includes some strong protections for service to people with disabilities. With all its limitations, particularly its potential for increasing the concentrated power of communications behemoths, the legislation still counts, on balance, as modestly progressive.

The adoption of comprehensive reform of communications provides an instructive comparison with the earlier defeat of comprehensive reform of health care. Reforming an industry as large as health care was thought to be too ambitious; yet the sheer scale of communications, which represents an even larger share of the economy, never counted as an objection to a comprehensive bill. The Clinton health plan and other broad proposals were said to be too complex for most people to grasp; yet the communications legislation was incomprehensible to all but experts. (This summer the Federal Communications Commission released a more than 500-page ruling that sets out the terms for competition in the local phone market, which is just one aspect of the bill.) Some laissez-faire conservatives did want the government simply to go cold turkey on regulation, but the communications industries themselves explained they needed a regulatory referee.

Did favorable public opinion produce a positive outcome for the communications bill? There never really was any public opinion about it. The Telecommunications Act was the work chiefly of the business interests that negotiated it in concert with a few key congressional representatives and government officials. Telecommunications reform passed

chiefly because of the commitment of its business sponsors, whereas health care reform suffered a decisive blow in early 1994 when business, large as well as small, decided it had more to lose than gain. Moreover, telecommunications reform didn't require any federal revenue; universal phone service (which is just over 90 percent "coverage") is supported by subsidies built inconspicuously into charges. But there was no way to finance universal health coverage without some major source of new revenue.

As I write at the end of July, Congress is moving toward approval of health insurance reforms initially introduced by Senators Edward M. Kennedy and Nancy Kassebaum. The Kennedy-Kassebaum bill confirms the pattern I've just described. It is utterly

**H**igh-energy talk of change evokes high-energy responses. Seek to inspire your supporters, and you may inspire the opposition even more.

inoffensive to both big corporations and small business and calls for no significant new financing. Some refer to the bill as "incrementalist," but "minimalist" would be more apt. By comparison, President Bush's 1992 proposals would have done far more. After all the debate about the uninsured, the legislation offers no assistance to help people without insurance buy it. Instead, it mainly tries to help people with insurance keep it—a worthy objective, especially to

those of us who already have coverage. The legislation is supposed to guarantee "portability"—a misleading claim, because employees will not be able to carry the same insurance or stay in the same HMO after leaving a job, except for the short-term coverage available under COBRA. Under the legislation, insurers will be unable to deny coverage for a pre-existing condition to people who have been covered for the previous 12 months under another plan. There is no limit, however, on what the insurer can charge, although some provisions are meant to help keep rates down. You'll have a right to coverage if you can pay for it.

As a result of pressure from conservatives in the House, the health legislation also includes provisions for a four-year national experiment with medical savings accounts (MSAs). The experiment will enable 750,000 people to use tax-sheltered dollars to pay out-of-pocket costs under insurance policies with very high deductibles. Those who don't get



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sick and thus don't use their MSAs can keep the money. This is a wonderful deal for people who are healthy and relatively affluent; by pulling these people out of the general insurance pool, however, the MSAs are likely to make insurance more expensive for everyone else.

The significance of the health insurance legislation depends on how it is followed up. The MSA experiment could become the proverbial camel's nose under the tent, or Kennedy-Kassebaum could help to clarify the limitations of minimalist market reforms. Since the legislation provides no financing for the uninsured, it is unlikely to reduce their number significantly. In a future recession, the limitations will be especially apparent because the portability provisions mainly help people who change jobs, not those who lose them. Supporters of Kennedy-Kassebaum have justified it as a kind of confidence builder for a Congress nervous about any action on health care. But the debate will move ahead only when enough people lose confidence that minimalism is enough.

**T**he Republican Congress might have dissolved without any sense of historic achievement if it had not been for passage of welfare reform. Perhaps the House conservatives finally recognized that their own inflexibility had led to a self-inflicted defeat in the battle of the budget. In the compromise on welfare reform that they struck in midsummer with Senate moderates and the President, they gave up their effort to end the federal entitlements to Medicaid and food stamps, and they retreated on a number of subordinate issues, such as the "family cap" on benefit increases for children born on welfare. They gave enough ground to get Clinton's signature and thus triumphed on their central goal: eliminating the federal entitlement to cash assistance, setting time limits on benefits, and devolving authority to the states.

There is no doubting the symbolic impact of these changes. President Clinton came to office hoping to make health care a right of every American and has ended up signing legislation that abolishes the right of dependent children to a minimum standard of subsistence. Of course, he put welfare into play himself; he said the system was broken and pledged to fix it by establishing a new framework that would move recipients from dependency to work. His view is also that the enti-

tlement to cash assistance has never been much of a right, given the enormous variations in eligibility criteria and benefit levels from state to state, and that the poor will be better off if antipoverty efforts are reconstructed on a new foundation. That may yet turn out to be true, as many articles in this journal have argued. Indeed, one virtue of Clinton's decision is that it cuts off the defense of traditional welfare as a political strategy and forces all sides to think seriously about full employment.

Still, this legislation is a long way from Clinton's original program and from any genuine effort to ameliorate poverty. Instead of expanding support for training, child care, and health insurance to help the poor get off and stay off welfare, the legislation reduces expenditures and provides no assurance of work or any source of income when benefits end. After welfare recipients hit their limits, it will just be too bad for them, their children, and the communities that must deal with the consequences if they lose their homes and are forced into complete destitution.

A decade after Charles Murray in *Losing Ground* called for abolishing welfare outright, the federal government has taken the first step—if this is really the first step. The significance of welfare reform, like Kennedy-Kassebaum, will depend on how it is followed up. It provides states the latitude to cut benefits; much will now depend on whether there is a race to the bottom, as past experience and fiscal incentives both suggest. Ultimately, the basic premise of this reform—that the poor will shape up and get work when they can't get away with freeloading—will run up against the reality that employers don't want all these workers. The harsh provisions of this legislation may simply not hold once the human impact becomes clear. But this is to assume that the theory of conservative welfare reform is falsifiable by evidence of human misery, and that may be expecting too much.

**F**rom these past four years, it is difficult to distill much optimism, but there are at least some cautionary lessons worth retaining.

**Beware the countermobilizing effects of reform.** High-energy talk of change evokes high-energy responses. Seek to inspire your supporters, and you may inspire the opposition even more. Clinton did it on health care reform. Gingrich did it on Medicare. The Christian Coalition does it on its social agenda.

Many people who cannot agree what to do can agree what not to do and thus can be organized more effectively around a negative proposition than a positive one. Progressives face a particularly difficult choice because their adversaries are likely to have more resources to countermobilize than they have to mobilize. This is not to say that reformers should proceed quietly. But they have far more need of defusing the opposition with early compromises than the hard-liners among them typically recognize.

**Class interests count.** Politics is still, in the classic phrase, about who gets what, and in the final analysis, class interests played a critical role in who got what in the policy conflicts of the past four years. When the dust cleared in the battle of the budget, the poor were the principal losers. The risk of welfare reform will be borne by poor women and children. After debating what to do for the roughly 40 million uninsured, the Congress did nothing. Instead, it adopted portability provisions that meet the middle-class concerns about keeping coverage between jobs and set up experimental tax shelters that are great for healthy people in higher income brackets. In one of the few steps that ran in the opposite direction, Clinton and the Congress in 1993 made the income tax more progressive by raising taxes on the wealthy and cutting taxes on the poor through the earned income tax credit. But this was reported, and is now remembered, as a tax increase, even though more people actually had their taxes cut and the vast majority of Americans were not affected by the higher taxes on the rich. And big tax cuts that will make federal taxes more regressive are now on the table.

**Sometimes the best new idea is an old idea.** In the world of public finance, there is a saying that "an old tax is a good tax" (Someone might have mentioned it to Al Gore when he was pushing the Btu levy in 1993.) The idea applies more generally. Regulation was thought to be unpopular, until disaster struck in the air and the public demanded stricter airline safety and security rules. Many people were surprised by the public's positive reaction to the Clinton administration's new approach to

meat inspection. Who cares about meat inspection? It turns out a lot of people do. England's recent bout with mad cow disease may have helped to remind Americans (including ranchers and restaurateurs) of the virtues of regulation. The debate over the minimum wage is another example of the discovery that an old idea may still be the best idea available. I suspect that the coming debate over Social Security may lead to the same appreciation.

Another old idea is that political leaders can't accomplish much if they have no larger force behind them. The outcome of recent conflicts over national policy, particularly health care and welfare reform, testifies to a deeper failure. The Clinton presidency has failed to reverse—even to contest—the ideological sway that conservative ideas have enjoyed since Reagan, and it has been unable to stir any movements comparable to the unions in the 1930s or the civil rights movements in the '60s that could support its policies on behalf of Americans facing economic insecurity and restricted opportunities. Most likely, no president could have done much about these political realities; Clinton hasn't tried—and by echoing conservative ideas about government and balanced budgets, he may have helped to solidify the orthodoxy. As long as these underlying forces persist, America is unlikely to take a much different direction than it is now following—though it could certainly do worse. Of course, the turn to the right in national policy does have one benefit: It could be a potent countermobilizer. □

Politics is still about who gets what, and class interests had a telling impact on who got what in the policy conflicts of the past four years.

### Submission Guidelines

*The American Prospect* accepts unsolicited contributions. Writers are strongly encouraged to send brief query letters (750 words or less) rather than finished articles. Submissions should be sent electronically via e-mail to [prospect@epn.org](mailto:prospect@epn.org) or by regular mail to *The American Prospect*, P.O. Box 383080, Cambridge, MA 02238. All submissions will be acknowledged; if you wish to have your manuscript returned, please provide a self-addressed stamped envelope.



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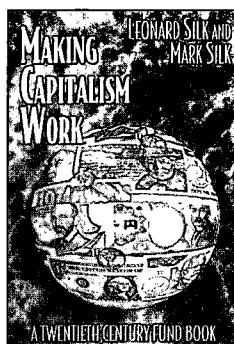


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## SPECIAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION EDITION

### HERITAGE HYPOCRISY I

It's no secret that the Heritage Foundation is conservative, but there's a significant distinction between advocating an ideology and actively assisting a candidate for political office. Doing the former is common among tax-exempt nonprofit groups like Heritage and its liberal counterparts; doing the latter is illegal.

Heritage's support of Bob Dole's presidential campaign dangles right on the edge of illegality. In exchange for Dole's signature on a fundraising letter, Heritage gave the candidate one-time use of its mailing list for his own fundraising purposes.

The Internal Revenue Service prohibits tax-exempt organizations from attempting to influence the outcome of an election. Giving something of value, like a mailing list, to a political candidate would certainly violate this regulation. John von Kannon, a Heritage spokesman, argues that it was a fair trade, and thereby legitimate. "We have determined that the value of his signature is equal to the value of the list," he says. Heritage's list rents on the open market for \$26,643.33. It would be an astonishing coincidence if

Dole's signature is worth precisely that amount.

As a nonprofit, Heritage also cannot endorse a candidate. Dole is of course free to endorse whomever he chooses, but the letter, envelope, and enclosed "Reform Facts" brochure (see opposite page) suggest more than one-way support. Dole's name appears above Heritage's on the envelope and at the top of Heritage's stationery.

The letter reads like a Dole for President ad, mentioning Heritage only incidentally. Dole requests that the reader fill out a survey (with questions like "Which Cabinet Departments would you reduce or cut entirely?") and mail it, along with a donation, to him at the Heritage Foundation—it's not all that clear for whom the donation is intended. Heritage's implied endorsement of Dole couldn't be much stronger.



While Heritage is subject to IRS regulations, Dole has to worry about Federal Election Commission laws. A spokesman for the FEC said that Dole and Heritage would have to definitively prove that the signature's value is equal to or greater than the value of the list. If it weren't, then Heritage would be giving Dole an in-kind donation. Since corporations cannot give anything of value to candidates (and

the candidate cannot accept it), both Heritage and Dole would be in trouble with the FEC.

Even if the IRS and FEC determine that the signature-for-list trade does not violate these laws, there's still the matter of how much Dole can spend on his own campaign—since he received federal matching funds, he is limited to \$50,000 of his own money. According to both Heritage and Dole, the list was fair compensation for the signature, so Dole essentially put the payment towards his campaign. If he doesn't declare it as a personal contribution and spends more than the limit in other funds, he would be in violation of yet another FEC regulation.

Evidently, Dole's tough-on-crime stance doesn't extend to nonprofits who flout the IRS, or to campaigns that find loopholes in FEC laws.

### HERITAGE HYPOCRISY II

In the letter discussed above, Dole takes a second out of his campaign pitch to mention that: "The Heritage Foundation actually lives by the free market system they advocate. Heritage accepts no government funds and relies on voluntary gifts to support their work."

As we pointed out above, Heritage is *tax-exempt*, one of the biggest forms of government subsidy available.

*continued on page 15*

**BOB DOLE**

*I want to get Washington off your back and out of your pocket.*

*I want to start by abolishing the departments of Education, Housing and Urban Development, Energy and Commerce.*

*They are examples of all that is wrong in Washington.*

Dear Friend,

I want to take power from Washington and put it back in your hands.

I want the federal government to focus on the jobs it does best, such as defending our nation, conducting foreign relations and putting criminals in jail.

This message -- these clear ideas -- is the engine of political change in America today. It put Congress in conservative hands for the first time in forty years.

And working with my close friends at The Heritage Foundation (who have spent two decades trying to cut government) I want to change how Washington taxes, spends and regulates.

\*Families, not bureaucrats, should control what their children are taught.

\*Billions can be saved and service improved by rethinking, cutting and merging the 14 Cabinet Departments as they exist today.

I want to start by getting rid of the departments of Education, Housing and Urban Development, Energy and Commerce.

And you can help me by reading the enclosed fact sheet I have prepared with the help of Heritage's respected policy experts.

It offers real leadership. Real help for our country.

Why start with these four?

THE HERITAGE FOUNDATION

## REFORM FACTS

by Bob Dole and The Heritage Foundation

message that Americans want less government, less rules and less cynicism made it to Washington. And while there are many issues facing Congress, pressing than cutting costs and red tape.

ask ourselves: Do we really need to spend about \$11 million dollars helium reserve for WWI era airships? Must we spend nearly \$400 million on the National Foundations on the Arts and Humanities?

reevaluate everything. Programs that are obsolete, duplicated elsewhere should never have existed must be cut. This must be done in order to purge out of your tax dollars and to decrease Washington's role in our

targets for scaling back government are the departments of Education, Housing and Urban Development, Energy and Commerce. Let's fully eliminate them. These departments are ineffective, burdensome and meddlesome -- today they spend more than \$70 billion per year and employ more than 74,000

ere created to solve challenges -- but over One Trillion dollars later more problems than they ever solved. They are better known for bureaucracy, scandal and waste, than anything remotely connected

the major networks and news organizations -- which is no surprise. You know the press is mostly run by lifelong liberals.

Completing your survey, please send it back along with a check to The Heritage Foundation to help them continue their valuable work. Your gift of \$15, \$25, \$50 or more is tax deductible. In return, you will have access to the same ideas and information that conservative leaders are using to cut government.

At The Heritage Foundation actually lives by the free market. Heritage accepts no government funds and relies on the support of its members to support their work.

At a moment to read our fact sheet on shutting down the departments of Education, Housing and Urban Development, Energy and Commerce forever. Tell us what you think by completing and mailing it back today. In advance, I thank

*Bob Dole*  
Bob Dole

*P.S. I want to change how Washington taxes, spends and regulates.*

But with Bill Clinton in the White House -- true reform will not come easily. It requires all who want it to work together.

That's why I am working with The Heritage Foundation to restore our future by limiting government to its core functions such as national defense and fighting crime.

I want to start by cutting the departments of Education, Housing and Urban Development, Energy and Commerce. This saves billions of your tax dollars immediately.

How do you feel about this?

Tell me today. Please complete the enclosed survey and return it to me at The Heritage Foundation. Also, your gift of \$15, \$25 or \$50 to join Heritage today is greatly appreciated. Thank you.

**BOB DOLE**  
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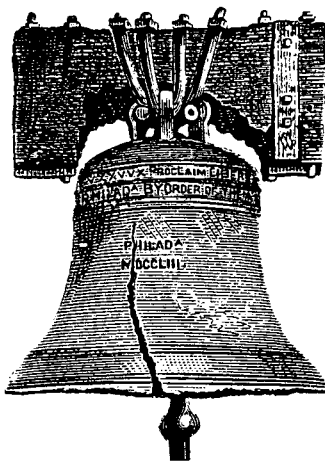
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*continued from page 12*

## HERITAGE HIGH-BALLING

In its ongoing efforts to turn Americans against social programs like Medicare, the Heritage Foundation has resorted to phony arithmetic. A June 18 press release from the think tank warns in bold capital letters: "Average Household Faces \$14,000 Tax Bill To Keep Medicare Afloat." The press release, and corresponding study by Stuart M. Butler, detail the rising costs of Medicare and the resulting tax burden.

Butler's analysis claims that over the next nine years (1997-2005), every household in the country will end up paying \$14,000 to cover additional costs for the Medicare program. Butler reasons that the hospital insurance portion, Part A, will require \$400 billion in increased funding, and Part B, which covers doctor visits and other services, will cost \$1.2 trillion. Since about 30 percent of that is paid by beneficiaries, the taxpayer share will come to \$950 billion. The Medicare program will therefore require a total of \$1.35 trillion over the next nine years, which he divides into a \$14,000-per household share. Butler calls his results, "grim reading." They are, but not in the way he meant it.

Richard Kogan of the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities

analyzed Butler's calculations for *The American Prospect*. He discovered that Butler fails arithmetic. Using data from the Congressional Budget Office, Kogan figured the increased costs for Part A to be \$331.6 billion, \$68.4 billion less than Butler's estimate. But the real dishonesty is in the Part B costs. Butler uses the total Part B costs and adds them to the increase in Part A costs, resulting in an incredibly misleading number. The additional Part B costs come to \$273.4 billion, as opposed to Heritage's \$950 billion.

The real increase in Medicare costs (Part A + Part B) totals \$605 billion, not \$1.35 trillion. In a single year like 1996, this would mean an additional \$195 in taxes per typical household. Over nine years, the additional cost per household would equal \$1,752, not Butler's \$14,000. Inflation will, of course, cause incomes (and with them, taxes) to rise, but the percentage of a household's income that goes to cover additional Medicare costs will stay constant.

Butler's ultimate point, that the Medicare program needs adjustment, is not particularly controversial. Indeed, a straightforward analysis of the problem might prove helpful, but the Heritage Foundation's attempts to promote its agenda through deceptive accounting is just dishonest.

## HERITAGE HYPERBOLE

In the July 8, 1996 edition of Heritage's online feature "The Right Numbers," the conservative foundation notes that the AmeriCorps national service program costs \$26,654 per participant. This figure, which is indeed accurate, was widely cited by congressional Republicans when they tried to kill the program last fall. But what AmeriCorps's GOP critics and the Heritage Foundation neglect to add is that taxpayers don't actually pay that amount.

Thanks to private donations and corporate sponsors, the average cost to the taxpayer is about \$19,000. In some states, the cost is even lower—the Massachusetts program costs just \$10,500 per participant. But even these figures are misleading considering that AmeriCorps volunteers perform needed maintenance and repairs that the government would otherwise have to pay someone else to do—most likely at a higher cost—or go without.

AmeriCorps cuts costs, encourages public-private cooperation, and teaches young people the value of discipline and hard work. Remind us again why the Republicans want to do away with it?

—Robyn Gearey

## CONSISTENCY DEFICIT

Give the Concord Coalition credit. When Bob Dole released an economic plan audaciously promising both a balanced budget and a 15 percent across-the-board tax cut, the Coalition—a vocal advocate for balanced budgets—took out a one-page ad in the *New York Times* critical of the proposed tax cuts. Even Warren Rudman, a close friend of Dole's who is one of the Coalition's founders, signed it.

Alas one will not find such consistency at some other groups who claim to worry about the deficit. Take Citizens for a Sound Economy, a grassroots organization that has been a relentless critic of Clinton's budgets. "The President's budget supposedly balances by 2002, but it fails to

state, in detail, which discretionary programs would have their spending growth restrained," a CSE paper from June reported. "By avoiding an explicit description of changes to programs, the President manages to avoid tough decisions, while putting on the appearance of balancing the budget. This is a classic example of Washington politicians trying to pull the wool over the public eye."

So what does CSE have to say about the Dole plan, whose supply-side fudges and backloads make Clinton's look like grammar school fibs? They like it, says Leila Bate, CSE's director of tax and budget policy. "He did as much as he could to appease both the supply-siders and the deficit hawks. He is trying to stay on track to a balanced budget by 2002. . . . Growth should be the goal."

—J.S.C.

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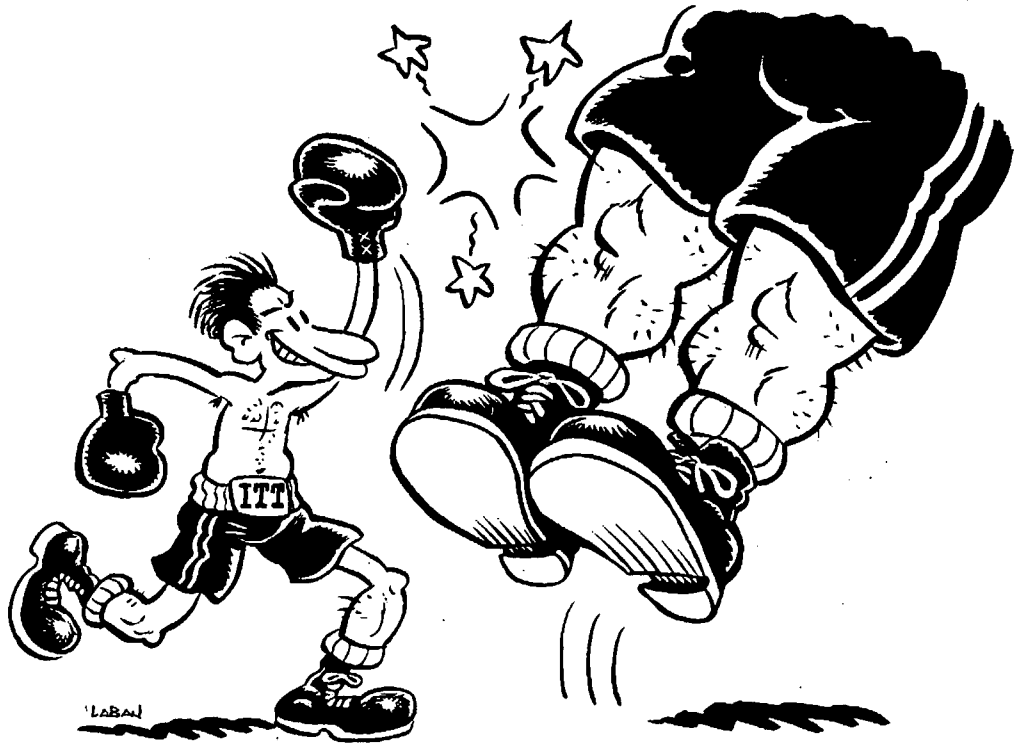
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STEVEN TELES

# The Liberal Virtues

**T**he welfare state and the advocates of "virtue" have few friends in common. Those on the right want to save virtue from the welfare state, while those on the left want to protect the welfare state from the rhetoric of virtue. An exemplar of the latter tendency is James Morone's "The Corrosive Politics of Virtue" (May-June 1996).

**VIRTUE  
AND  
POLITICS**

Morone suggests two ways in which morality and politics can mix. The first, the virtue approach, is directed toward groups and individuals, and is characterized by a politics of blame. The virtue approach

divides citizens against one another, and thus undermines the social cohesion necessary for universal social provision. The second form of moral politics, which Morone advocates, is firmly universalist, oriented toward social conditions rather than individual attributes. This form of moral politics, which we might call social equity politics, "rouse[s] Americans to expand rights, overcome biases, attack inequity." The moral core of social equity politics is "an idea that people share a common experience, a common fate, and common values. When liberals call for universal programs, they are tapping into precisely such a political construct."

Virtue politics leads to witch-burning, lynching, and the stigmatization of "the other." Social equity politics leads to the New Deal, the abolition and civil rights movements, and equal rights for women. Not a difficult choice.

Or is it? Morone's often overheated rhetoric and inaccurate historical comparisons obscure the attractions that the idea of virtue holds for liberals.

Morone's genealogical approach to the politics of virtue is not uncommon in fashionable academic discourse. Pick an argument you disagree with, demonstrate its unseemly

pedigree, and then dismiss it on the basis of its tainted origins. In Morone's case, the argument looks like this. Conservatives complain that America is becoming more secular, that it is losing its virtue, and that divine retribution is coming. Guess what? Morone might say. The same argument led to racist immigration rules. Gotcha! The conservative argument is invalidated.

This is deconstruction on the cheap; it is repugnant because it avoids a deep confrontation with the argument, because it ignores what might be learned even from those one disagrees with, and because it is a rhetorical form that can be used against liberals as easily as against conservatives.

The modern welfare state, for example, originated in nineteenth-century Germany, largely as a mechanism for protecting the power of an autocratic government. Is the welfare state illegitimate as a result? Many in the early birth control movement wanted wider access to contraceptives to keep down the birth rates of newly arrived immigrants, whom they considered uncivilized. Should this stop liberals from advocating the widest possible access to contraception? Obviously not.

Morone's overly sweeping indictment of all concern for individual character leads him to ignore the possibility that there is another, less extreme way to talk about virtue. This approach, far from serving as a bludgeon against the welfare state, may be the best foundation for its political and substantive renewal.

This approach assumes that, like all regimes, a liberal democratic, welfare capitalist society requires citizens of a particular type. They must have certain capacities, disciplines, and habits that allow them to contribute to and benefit from the regime's institutions and way of life. Together, these capacities, disciplines, and habits comprise a plausible definition of "virtue."

Modern, liberal society requires citizens to

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go to work every day, even when they don't want to; to nurture and discipline their children, even when the children are loud, noisy, and annoying; to obey the law, even when great wealth could result from breaking it; to exhibit tolerance, even in the face of our dizzying and confusing diversity. The ability to perform these basic obligations of citizenship, upon which all decent society rests, is not automatic. It is developed by institutions that teach, foster, and support human character.

One of those institutions can, and should be, the welfare state. What liberals know, and what conservatives too often ignore, is the way that economic conditions threaten the virtue of citizens. Maintaining the discipline of work is extremely hard when employment is scarce, or where companies treat employees like disposable goods. Holding together a family, difficult in all times, is even harder where economic insecurity adds stress and anxiety. The temptations of a life of crime are hard to resist when there is little pulling in the other direction. In all these areas, and probably more, the welfare state is a necessary support for virtue.

**I**t is not, however, a substitute. The welfare state can help protect virtue, but in only a few cases can it create that virtue in the first place. The welfare state can help preserve the institutions that inculcate virtue, such as the family, but it can't create the norms that cause people to prefer a domestic way of life over one of immediate gratification. The welfare state works best where it can draw upon a foundation of self-control, discipline, and a willingness to respect rules that conflict with one's immediate desires.

This foundation of virtue is what gave a strong moral cast to the programs of the New Deal. Aid to Dependent Children was justified as a way to protect a mother's virtue, which was then seen as imperiled by the need to go to work after the death of a husband. The Works Progress Administration and the economic reorganization programs of the New Deal were justified as a way to keep honest, hard-working Americans from losing their self-reliance and discipline in the face of economic hardship.

Liberals should pursue the reconstruction of the welfare state with an eye toward connecting virtue and social provision. They should attempt to reshape social programs so that, at the least, they do not imperil the predispositions necessary for civic

life, and where possible (as in the case of substituting work for cash in welfare reform) they serve to inculcate civic discipline where it has frayed.

Liberals, in fact, have little to fear and much to gain by entering the discussion of virtue. Citizens who exercise their fundamental civic obligations can claim social protections on the basis of justice, while those who fail to exercise these obligations (by not seeking work or shirking their obligations to their family) can claim social protections only on the basis of "compassion." The language of virtue necessarily spills over into the language of justice, the claims that equal citizens make on each other. Compassion, on the other hand, is always characterized by the inequality between the helped and the helper, and thus smacks of noblesse oblige. Bounded self-reliance, which recognizes the necessity and fragility of independence, forms the strongest foundation for welfare-state claims in our regime. Strengthening the legitimacy and effectiveness of welfare-state programs requires fostering this self-reliant virtue.

To paraphrase Morone, the real threat is not virtue, but what liberals do to themselves trying to argue against it.

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DAVID BLANKENHORN

## Divorce From The Facts

**A** serious case can be made against today's politics of virtue, but James Morone fails to make it. For example, as his only evidence to show that worrying about our current divorce rate is misguided—and to dispute my assertion that we live in a "divorce culture"—Morone reminds us that 79 percent of American households included a married couple in 1990, down only slightly from 82.5 percent in 1980.

What a joke. First, Morone conflates family and nonfamily households, thus disguising the sharp decline of marriage that has occurred among households containing children. Second, he conflates marriage and remarriage, thus absurdly suggesting that millions of second and third marriages



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in our generation somehow demonstrate the continuing stability of marriage. Third, he picks the short, arbitrary time frame of 1980 to 1990, thus conveniently ignoring the fact that marriage has been steadily decomposing for at least three decades now, with the most rapid period of decline occurring during the 1970s. Finally, Morone refuses to consider or even mention any of the widely known facts—that the United States has by far the world's highest divorce rate; that never-married mothers now account for about one-third of all childbirths; or that about 40 percent of all American children currently live apart from their fathers—that would undermine his thesis.

This lack of intellectual seriousness is also evident when Morone urges us to stop “moralizing” about divorce and unwed childbearing and to focus instead on “real solutions” that are “likely to create strong two-parent families.” And what are these “real” (i.e., nonmoral) solutions? They are a better tax code, social services that “help” parents, job training, higher wages and better education, housing, health care, and child care. I am not sure I know anyone who opposes this list of good things. But if Morone has any evidence that lots more of any or all of these good things would reverse or even slow down the current trend of family fragmentation, he does not reveal it.

Morone points out that concern over moral decline is nothing new in our society. True enough. He might also have pointed out that attacking people concerned about moral decline is nothing new. Indeed, Morone's basic thesis—that what most people erroneously and dangerously view as moral issues are in fact economic issues in disguise—has been around for quite some time, especially on university campuses. Today, notwithstanding the large and growing body of evidence to the contrary, this economic thesis remains an unquestioned article of faith among many scholars and journalists, as readers of this magazine will doubtless realize.

Let me end on a political note. According to Morone, as long as our society remains sidetracked by false moral debates, progressives can “forget about” social and economic justice. Maybe so. But what if moral debates are more than the results of false consciousness? What if real moral problems actually exist? If they do, then it might be wiser to argue that, as long as progressives seek only to dismiss or wish away moral problems, rather than con-

fronting them directly, they can “forget about” making progress on—or even gaining much of a hearing for—the issues of economic justice that matter most to them.

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### JAMES A. MORONE REPLIES:

**S**teven Teles and David Blankenhorn each engage morality in serious ways, but each, I think, illustrates the perils of the genre.

Liberal regimes, argues Steven Teles, require virtuous citizens. Society must foster basic decency: good parenting, respect for law, tolerance. So far, so good. But now comes the hard part. Exactly who gets to sort out vice from virtue? Look around at the current applicants for the job: Ralph Reed and the Christian Coalition, Randall Terry and Operation Rescue, Phyllis Schlafly and the Eagle Forum, Trent Lott and the Republican Congress, local school boards touting creationism. As James Madison put it, “Enlightened statesmen will not always be at the helm.”

I don't imagine Steven Teles means to embrace that whole crowd. So he now faces the tough part of his job: articulating the moral standards that distinguish his high-flying moral vision from theirs. No good being vague about it. After all, each group mentioned in the preceding paragraph could easily endorse Teles's commentary—they would differ on what we might call the implementation details.

It is mischievous to conduct a vague seminar on virtue as if the culture battle did not exist. As if it had never been fought before. The morals gang ought to get damn clear on how they differ from the neo-nativists. Because in popular American culture, the great drumbeat about bad morals mixes with anxiety and produces a politics of resentment and a search for scapegoats.

Teles sidesteps the tough issue of just how to articulate “our” values by organizing his argument around a loaded distinction: On the one side lies virtue, on the other the welfare state. But wait a minute. A more accurate analytic distinction is between moral politics (which makes private morals the public business) and liberalism (which, avowedly, does not). Moral crusaders enter American politics to both expand and contract basic rights. Those are the two sides of morality politics that I described in my article, the two great traditions in

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American reform movements. The expansive side includes fights for citizenship rights, suffrage, fair labor standards, and—yes—welfare benefits. (Teles quotes me as a fan of the New Deal, abolition, civil rights, and women's rights; only the first could be construed as a welfare state issue, the rest were about basic American rights.) On the constrictive side of moral politics, I don't know how to say it more clearly than I did in the original article: "It goes deeper than defeating new social programs. Moral panics erode liberalism itself."

Why is an intelligent observer getting basic categories in American political development bollixed up? Because the distinction he slips into—virtue versus welfare—is a powerful rhetorical strategy of the contemporary right. Contempt, racial animosity, and xenophobia have been smuggled into images of welfare and the underclass. Today's iniquitous American other—40 million strong, says Senator Phil Gramm—is on the dole. Alas, the stereotype has proved a political blockbuster. Images of black welfare mothers and their criminal sons get the neo-nativist juices flowing with a vengeance.

All of which brings us back to the big job in front of thoughtful virtue advocates like Teles: distinguish yourselves in a forceful and systematic way from the corrosive politics of virtue. If you can.

I have a good deal of sympathy for David Blankenhorn. After all, he was off minding his own business when along comes my article with its gratuitous swipe at his work. Without putting aside our substantial differences, let me say that *Fatherless America* is an honest and intelligent book.

But we do disagree, both in our diagnoses and our cures. For my money, Blankenhorn fails to see any context for the problem of fatherlessness. In fact, he seems to see little else whatsoever. His model runs like this: the culture shifted (and traditional marriage becomes uncool); families break up; social problems follow. That's it. Not a word about anything else in the morals debate; for that matter, not a word about anything in my original article outside of the two paragraphs on divorce.

If social scientists have learned anything in the past decades, it is to distrust single-factor explanations. There are, I tried to suggest, powerful forces surrounding debates about the traditional family. Most important, we've had a revolution in the social and economic role of women. We've had a major immigration that is again changing the face of

America and again stirring anxiety among the older natives. And, yes, there's no getting around it: We are living through a great economic transformation. (Both responses incidentally illustrate a standard conservative riposte to the analysis of economic forces: Tsk about economic determinism, then ignore the subject.) Look back at the similar forces operating on the United States at the end of the last century and you'll find a remarkably similar, simple, diagnosis: outcry about declining family values.

From Blankenhorn's perspective, tightly focused on fatherhood, it is a "joke" that I lump together married couples (good people) with divorced people who remarry (not good people). But in the real world of politics, divorce does not stop men and women from thinking themselves moral and hounding immoral others who threaten American values. When I first made notes for this article, three divorced men—Phil Gramm, Bob Dole, and Newt Gingrich—were all over the news. Being divorcees, they all flunk Blankenhorn's test of virtue. But that did not stop them from pumping up the volume over family values as they courted the Christian right.

In a hot moralizing environment, calling shame down on broken families—or on anyone else—ought to be done with a chary eye for the political consequences. The raw number of unwed fathers in the African American community is huge. I tried to suggest in detail why an overly simple (and out of context) focus on fatherhood was likely, among other things, to trigger a devil of a racial backlash.

But not a word on race in either commentary. So, let me say it again: The search for unvirtuous people keeps feeding racial tensions and stereotypes. Intelligent observers mongering virtue ought to think long and hard about the consequences of their solutions for America's recurring bouts of racial injustice. And, again, they ought to be loud and clear about how they differ from the hard-right neonativism stirring again in the United States.

Still, there is at least one matter on which all three of us can agree. Both of my interlocutors suggest that the left has nothing to fear from moral politics. Amen. The advocates of social and economic justice could certainly use an infusion of the moral fervor and conviction that once characterized their efforts.

By the same token, conservatives should not fear putting limits on their own moralism. Firmly rejecting images that foster nativism, prejudice, and division would be the virtuous thing for them to do. □

# SAVED ASSETS

To the Editors:

Judith Bell's article, "Saving Their Assets" [May-June 1996], was recently brought to my attention.

The author of the article was clearly ill-informed about what has happened, and is happening, in Maryland with respect to the possible conversion of our local Blue Cross and Blue Shield plan to for-profit status. The article repeats criticisms of me as Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Maryland's principal state regulator, which appeared in the *Baltimore Sun* last year, for failing to hold a public hearing on the matter. For the record, I would point out that I did hold a public hearing in late 1994 on a related proposal from Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Maryland,

and I subsequently disapproved the proposal. At the time of the *Baltimore Sun* editorial, no further proposal had been presented to me that might appropriately be the subject of a public hearing. Nor has any proposal been presented to me subsequently up to the date of this writing. Your article refers to "completed, pending, or about to be announced" proposals in a number of states, including Maryland. Perhaps the article's author knows something I don't know, although I doubt it. As a matter of fact, the CEO of Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Maryland has told me that he has no immediate plans to make further proposals of the type discussed in your article.

Publications such as yours have an obligation to the public to verify the allegations being

made. Clearly you failed in this circumstance.

*Dwight K. Bartlett, III  
Baltimore, Maryland*

*Mr. Bartlett is the insurance commissioner for the state of Maryland.*

## JUDITH BELL RESPONDS:

Commissioner Bartlett's letter focuses on a proposed 1994 transaction that was the subject of public hearings and critical newspaper articles in the *Baltimore Sun*. That transaction was controversial and involved substantial stock options for involved executives. It was ultimately disapproved, in January 1995, by the Commissioner. Unfortunately, the disapproval was followed by closed door discussions between the Commissioner and Blue Cross on how to restructure the proposal.

The *Baltimore Sun* continued to report on the proposed transaction and the questions it raised. As I correctly reported on page 62 of my article, it was only in the course of the reporting that the Commissioner maintained that he would eventually hold hearings on the plan, when Blue Cross resubmitted it. Evidently Blue Cross, according to the Commissioner, now does not intend to resubmit the plan.

The turn of events in Maryland makes clear how important public scrutiny is. Without it, valuable nonprofit charitable assets can be lost to individual private investors and

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high-level executives. The Maryland transaction, obviously, could not stand the light of day.

Our information was that Maryland Blue Cross was still planning on resubmitting their conversion proposal. I am happy to hear that they are not.

### LABORING UNDER FALSE PREMISES?

To the Editors:

Richard Rothstein's article ["Toward a More Perfect Union," May-June 1996] is generally a thoughtful analysis that recognizes that the living standards of American workers are no longer under the control of the American government because the financial-intellectual elite, along with the government, have favored a free-trade policy with low-wage havens such as Mexico and China.

I agree with Rothstein that the way ahead for labor will be truly a hard road. But I disagree fundamentally with his contention that a ban on the permanent replacement of workers is not a critical legislative first step. Rothstein's article focuses on labor's need to organize and on the need of Congress to provide reasonable statutory organizing tools. But workers' organizations will not likely achieve better wages and working conditions if their right to strike without permanent replacement is not legally protected. In the absence of proof that organizing is truly

beneficial (i.e., that organizing results in better wages and conditions, not lost jobs), it will be much harder for labor to encourage workers to organize.

The position of the AFL-CIO in pushing Congress for a ban on permanent replacement of lawful economic strikers was not misinformed. My experience as a lawyer for workers in Maine who were permanently replaced during the late 1980s despite their supposedly protected right to strike—and the consequent absence of any strike in Maine since lawful strikers were permanently replaced by International Paper and Boise Cascade—has convinced me that a statutory ban on the permanent replacement of lawful economic strikers is essential if labor is to bolster union representation.

*Patrick N. McTeague  
Topsham, Maine*

To the Editors:

Tom Geoghegan has hit the labor opportunity target again with a double-barreled shot of wit and wisdom ("Dear Brother Sweeney," Winter 1996). Having conducted research for the last two years on unions and philanthropic foundations, I was tickled to see his recommendation that organized labor tap into foundations.

Alas, Geoghegan's hyperbolic notion that Lane Kirkland sits on half the foundations' boards is

sadly the opposite state of affairs. Kirkland did sit on the Rockefeller Foundation board; Tom Donahue, the AFL-CIO's vice president, on the Carnegie board; and Glenn Watts of the Communication Workers on the Ford Foundation's. No longer, nor have they been replaced by other foundation figures. Unions are less represented on foundation boards (and staffs) than ever.

Unions and foundations have been wary of each other at least as far back as the Rockefeller Foundation's misadventure in the aftermath of the Ludlow Massacre in 1915. Still, the ensuing decades have seen some instances of collaboration, on a range of issues from community development and education, to occupational health and safety and civil rights. Much more could be done. The sine qua non is communication, to overcome stereotyping and suspicion on both sides.

May Brother Sweeney heed Geoghegan's advice.

*Richard Magat  
New Haven, Connecticut*

*Mr. Magat is a visiting fellow at  
Yale University.*

*The American Prospect welcomes correspondence. Brief letters are preferred and stand a better chance of being published. Letters must include the writer's name, address, and telephone number, and may be edited for length. Send letters to P.O. Box 383080, Cambridge, MA 02238, or via e-mail to [tap@epn.org](mailto:tap@epn.org).*

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# BACK FROM THE DEAD

## NEOPROGRESSIVISM IN THE '90S

BY E. J. DIONNE, JR.

**T**hese days, you can hear Republican members of Congress touting how much they have spent on programs for children, bragging about how pro-environment they are, recounting their efforts to buck the party leadership and pass a higher minimum wage. The party line, which once emphasized fierce loyalty to the impending conservative revolution, now tacitly encourages avoiding any party line. Many members who voted loyally with Newt Gingrich boast about how independent of the speaker they have been all along. To have at least one vote against a Contract with America item was once a sign of disloyalty in Republican circles. Now, it's an electoral asset.

What a difference a year makes. In 1995 when I was finishing a book called *They Only Look Dead*, the title was an obvious reference to liberals being less moribund than they seemed. My conservative friends scoffed at its prediction of a new Progressive Era. Now, several of them have remarked mournfully that the title might be taken as a reference to *them* and to *their* people. The current vogue is to be associated with moderation if not with liberalism. It is to tout compassion more than spending restraint and to speak of making government work rather than dismantling it or shutting it down. When Bob Dole said goodbye to the Senate, he mentioned Hubert Humphrey and George McGovern with some fondness. He didn't mention Newt Gingrich or Dick Armey at all—not, one suspects, just because they aren't senators.

What's striking about the current period is not just that congressional Republicans seem to be in some electoral trouble, or that Bob Dole has run—let's be charitable—a less-than-perfect campaign. It's the extent to which the conventional wisdom has been turned on its head. Consider:

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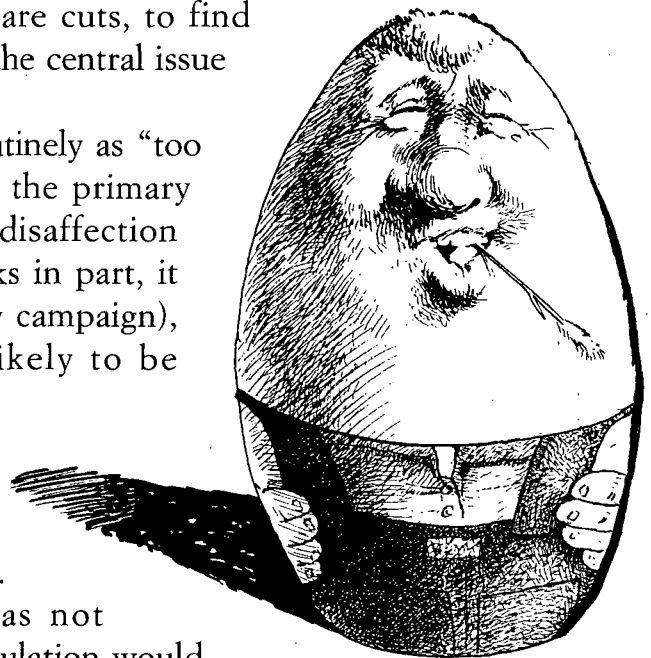
■ Through at least the middle of 1995, it was asserted universally that the most striking characteristics of the Republican Party and the conservative movement were discipline and unity. In the summer of 1996, what is remarked upon most is how divided Republicans are on taxes, abortion, and all manner of other issues, and how chaotic their movement has become.

■ In 1995, the Republicans were widely praised for their “boldness,” “honesty,” and, at times, “brilliance” in “tackling entitlements” and pushing for a balanced budget. In 1996, just about everybody says they “went too far” or “were too extreme” or “reached beyond their mandate.” Even Bill Kristol, the conservative intellectual-strategist-editor, has argued that it was foolish for the Republicans, who made absolutely no effort in the 1994 campaign to lay a basis for Medicare cuts, to find themselves a year later making Medicare the central issue in American politics.

■ In 1995, government—described routinely as “too big” or “too intrusive”—was said to be the primary (sometimes the only) source of public disaffection with politics and politicians. Now (thanks in part, it must be said, to Pat Buchanan’s primary campaign), public disgruntlement is far more likely to be explained by economic unease and the reaction to “downsizings.”

■ In 1995, the Republicans had near total control of the public debate about environmental and safety regulation. The question discussed routinely was not whether to deregulate, but how far deregulation would and should go. Now, that project is in jeopardy because the new conventional wisdom has discovered that environmental and safety regulations are popular, with support from strong and reactivated constituencies. A Republican explained this better than any Democrat. Referring to the public’s desire for aggressive airline safety inspection after the ValuJet crash, Senator Bill Cohen of Maine remarked: “Government is the enemy until you need a friend.”

You could conclude from all this that you should never take the conventional political wisdom too seriously—or that you should wait for the result of at least two elections before doing so. Why take the conventional wisdom of the summer of 1996 as any more accurate than its earlier incarnation? For all I know, the conventional wisdom will have changed again by the time you read this.

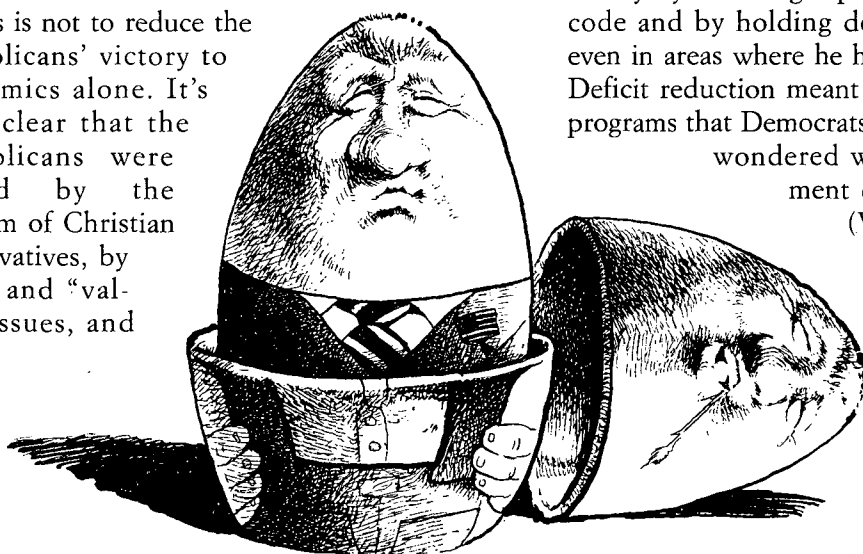




## AN ALTERNATIVE INTERPRETATION

The alternative view is more compelling: that the conventional wisdom of 1995 was wrong from the start, as some in this magazine suggested at the time. [See Paul Starr, "Who Owns the Future?" *TAP*, Spring 1995, and Robert Kuttner, "Up from 1994," *TAP*, Winter 1995.] Disaffection with the Democrats rested at least as much on what they failed to do (for example, pass a health care bill) as on what they did. The voters who turned on the Democrats were not angry about such internecine arguments as whether Clinton had run as a "new" Democrat and governed as an "old" one. They were not ideologues. As Ruy Teixeira has pointed out in his numerous writings on the subject [for example, Ruy Teixeira and Joel Rogers, "Who Deserted the Democrats in 1994?" *TAP*, Fall 1995], the Democrats lost most heavily among white voters who lacked college degrees. These were the voters who made the smallest economic gains, or no gains at all, in the early stages of the Clinton recovery. There is some evidence from polling by Stanley Greenberg that nonvoters in 1994 were more likely than voters to be disillusioned former Clinton supporters, many of them lower-middle-income people. Passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) may also have been a modest drag on the 1994 Democratic vote, decreasing enthusiasm within the party's union base while gaining Democrats no measurable ground among the upper-middle-class voters sympathetic to free trade.

This is not to reduce the Republicans' victory to economics alone. It's quite clear that the Republicans were helped by the activism of Christian conservatives, by social and "values" issues, and



especially by the intense feelings against the assault weapons ban among gun owners. The Republicans were also helped by the deep personal hostility to Clinton in conservative quarters (these voters wanted to vote Republican early and often) that was unmatched by any sort of devotion to him among moderates or liberals.

**B**ut this did not make 1994 an ideological verdict. On the contrary, this election was like so many other American elections, especially those characterized by "throw the bums out" sweeps. The Republican sweep was built on "anti" voting, not on the endorsement of a particular agenda, notably the Contract with America whose provisions were mysterious to most voters and barely remarked upon by most candidates. If the contract had any important electoral effect, it was as a critique of Democrats who had failed to keep their promises to reform health care, welfare, the political system, and job training. The Republicans were saying that their promises were real, that they, like Ross Perot, would get under the hood. Paradoxically, then, the implicit message of the explicitly antigovernment contract was that Republicans would preside over an energetic government oriented to action.

The election was also a powerful commentary on the political agony involved in deficit reduction. If there was one promise Clinton did keep—and spent a lot of political treasure in keeping—it was his promise to cut the deficit in half. Clinton did so mostly by restoring a progressive edge to the tax code and by holding down spending increases, even in areas where he had promised bold action. Deficit reduction meant that there were few new programs that Democrats could tout to voters who wondered what the federal government did with all their money.

(Welfare reform was one early casualty of the deficit fight: Spending designated for the training and education of welfare recipients was slashed at the last minute before Clinton presented his first budget.) Clinton and the

Democrats gained almost nothing politically for

their efforts. Deficit hawks were not won over; they repeatedly assailed Clinton for doing too little about the deficit. Voters only noticed that deficits had not been eliminated. For all the pain involved, the Republicans could still use the balanced budget issue for their own purposes—and denounce Democratic tax increases at the same time.

### THREE REPUBLICAN MISTAKES— AND THEN A FOURTH

Thus did Republicans win their great victory. Almost immediately, they made three big mistakes. First, they assumed that they could govern the country from Congress. As a result, they publicly took responsibility for all that went on in Washington. Newt Gingrich supplanted Bill Clinton as the city's most important news maker. President Clinton was now, in the famous word, irrelevant. Second, the Republicans assumed that Clinton would roll over and let them do what they wanted, on the theory that doing so was in Clinton's interest and that he would, in any event, lack the will to fight. Third, the Republicans assumed they had a broad and durable popular mandate for a strongly antigovernment program. In particular, they assumed that government was now so unpopular in the abstract that it would be possible to roll back regulation and to make substantial cuts in the growth even of popular programs such as Medicare. They also assumed that the antigovernment mood would save them from paying a heavy price for shutting the federal government down, if a shutdown was what it took to bend Clinton to their will.

In retrospect, it's easy to see some of the tactical inconsistencies within this approach. For example, with Republicans asserting publicly that they now controlled Washington, it was almost inevitable that they, not Clinton, would be blamed for the shutdown. There was, moreover, a profound inconsistency lurking in the standard Republican arguments about Clinton. The Republicans were asserting that Clinton was unprincipled, uninterested in anything but his own re-election, easily rolled. At the very same time, they were preparing to argue that if the government shut down, the collapse should be blamed on Clinton's intransigence. It may be theoretically possible for someone to be unprincipled and intransigent at the same time. But making the two arguments at once created a certain cognitive dissonance. It proved a hard sell.

The Republicans also underestimated Clinton's ability to work his way toward a successful strategy. A good case can be made that Clinton got to a politically brilliant endgame almost by accident. The administration itself was fiercely divided over how to deal with the Republican Congress. Clinton, by the account of many in his administration, was uncertain. In retrospect, Clinton did the politically clever thing by accepting one half of the strategy offered him by Dick Morris, his friend and a one-time consultant to Republicans, and rejecting the other half.

**M**orris argued, against liberals and congressional Democrats, that Clinton needed to accept the basic Republican premise: The President could not be seen as blocking a balanced budget. But he could profit politically from standing against the Republicans' way of reaching balance, especially if the President made the defense of popular programs—Medicare, Medicaid, environmental protection, and education—the cornerstone of his position.

This turned out to be good strategy because the theoretical principle of a balanced budget was broadly popular with the electorate. Large deficits had become the symbol not of a conscious federal policy (something many editors of this magazine might defend), but rather of a federal establishment gone out of control. Liberals inside the administration also came to realize that by setting the goal of a balanced budget in seven years, Republicans had given the administration ample room to push the most severe cuts out well beyond the life of a second Clinton administration. The Republicans could reasonably attack the administration for proposing a "fake" balanced budget. But their authority to do so was undercut by their own budgets, which also included deep cuts in the "out years."

Still, Morris turned out to be wrong in his other calculation: that the President's political interest lay in reaching agreement with the Republican Congress. Even here, Morris helped the President by sending out signals to his Republican friends that Clinton wanted a deal. This was a disinformation campaign without the disinformation—Morris believed he was accurately representing the President's position, and Clinton seemed to believe this for a time. But as the Republicans suffered under Democratic assaults, especially on Medicare,

Clinton concluded that the reaction against an increasingly unpopular Republican congressional leadership would be the primary instrument of his resurrection. This militated against any deal. The Republicans could not be cast as "extremists" if Clinton was willing to make a deal with them. And the country would not hanker for the protection of Clinton's veto pen if the "extremist" label didn't stick.

Here, the Republicans made their fourth big mistake. Clinton's own proposals gave them ample room to strike a budget deal that would have taken large chunks out of federal spending, including Medicare. Republicans would not have paid the Medicare price, yet they could still have claimed an abstract desire to cut more than Clinton would allow. The President's effectiveness in confronting the Republicans meant that the "intransigent" charge no longer seemed so silly. And in reaching agreement with Clinton, the Republicans would have split the Democratic Party. It is hard to imagine a majority of the congressional party, especially Democrats in the House, going along with a deal blessed by Newt Gingrich and Dick Armey.

Maybe it's a tribute to the Republicans' fierce philosophical consistency that they missed this chance. Whatever the reason, they did. They held their ground, their poll ratings collapsed, and Clinton dug in.

### THE BIG MISCALCULATION

But something more was going on than tactical politics. The Republicans' budget proposals forced the country to come to terms with what it really thought about sharp cuts in the deficit. Not deficit reduction in the abstract. Not "waste, fraud, and abuse." Not whether it would be nicer to pay lower taxes. Not whether "the era of big government" was over. If you wanted to end the deficit and also wanted rather substantial tax cuts—the political balancing act between Republican supply-siders and deficit hawks required both—you could not get there without cutting very popular programs, especially the health programs. It is possible to accuse the congressional Democrats of some demagoguery on Medicare (about proportional to

Republican demagoguery on the Clinton health care proposal) and still conclude that the country knew exactly what it was doing in moving against the Republicans' budget design. American voters

may not like government or particularly trust it, but (and this is the big fact the Republicans missed) neither do they fully like or trust what the market produces when it is unconstrained by government. The anxieties of the elderly and their children over the effects on health care from the withdrawal of fistfuls of future federal dollars were not the invention of any propaganda campaign. The Republicans did not answer these worries effectively because they simply could-

n't make the case that the big changes they proposed in Medicare were necessary to "saving" the program. They also wrongly calculated that generic opposition to "spending," "taxes," and "entitlements" would push them over the top. And so they lost the budget fight.

The final lesson about the Republican revolution came during this year's Republican primaries. If the basic problem facing the country was, as the Republicans claimed, too much government, then the Republican congressional program should have been wildly popular this year, especially among Republican voters. But during the primaries, the two candidates who dominated the argument were Pat Buchanan, who lashed out at "corporate butchers" for mass layoffs, and Steve Forbes, who pushed a flat tax to promote higher growth rates. On paper, Buchanan and Forbes were the most improbable presidents in the Republican field. Yet they became Dole's main adversaries—and beat him in several primaries—by campaigning against Washington and Congress almost as if both were still in Democratic hands. For Forbes and Buchanan, the central issue before the voters was not government as such, but the state of the economy. For Buchanan, the election was about the decline of middle-class jobs. For Forbes, the election was about achieving higher growth rates. Dole won the nomination, but Buchanan and Forbes defined the debate.

The GOP forced the public to come to terms with what it really thinks about sharp cuts in the federal budget.



## A NEW PROGRESSIVE ERA?

The lesson of the battles of 1995 and the early primaries of 1996 was essentially the same as the lesson of both 1992 and 1994: that a large and restive segment of the electorate, the Anxious Middle, is indeed unhappy about the state of the country and, yes, about government. But its unease runs deeper and its concerns are more subtle than the standard anti-Washington, antigovernment sloganeering would suggest. Public anger is rooted in distinct but overlapping crises involving the economy, politics, and morality.

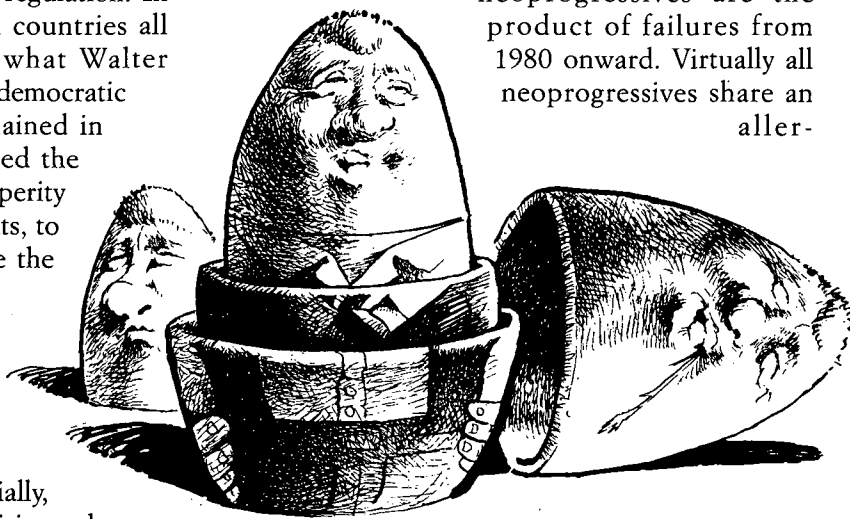
The economic crisis needs little comment: It is created by the transition to a new economy, the ferocity of global economic competition, and the impact of this competition on wages, working hours, and health and pension coverage. This, in turn, creates a political crisis. The global economy substantially reduces the autonomy of national governments and makes it harder for politicians to keep their promises on such basic matters as levels of economic growth, taxation, and regulation. In the postwar period, the industrial countries all pursued, under various names, what Walter Russell Mead has called the "social democratic bargain." Economic decisions remained in private hands, but governments used the tools at their disposal to spread prosperity more broadly, to create social benefits, to protect workers' rights, and to take the edge off economic downturns. The current political crisis is the crisis of this social democratic bargain.

Finally, there is the moral crisis, which liberals have been reluctant to address. In the United States especially, conservatives attribute the moral crisis to the counterculture of the 1960s. As Newt Gingrich put it, "We have to say to the counterculture: Nice try, you failed, you're wrong." Voters do see the moral crisis at least in part in the terms set by conservatives: in high crime rates, high levels of family breakdown, the poverty of Hollywood values, a coarsening of the culture. But the moral crisis is also experienced as a problem for those who, as Clinton has noted repeatedly, "work hard and play by the rules." In the new economy, it's not clear what the rules are. It's not obvious that hard work is rewarded or that loyalty to employers is ever required. Conservatives have profited from talking

about the first set of problems without necessarily offering any solutions. Progressives have only begun to grapple unapologetically with the fact that the moral crisis is as real and tangible to voters as paycheck politics—and that their task is to demonstrate the links between the two without denying the importance of either.

It is this end-of-century intimation of a great transition that undergirds the increasingly widespread view that the United States is ripe for a new Progressive Era. "There is," wrote the political scientist Hugh Heclo, "something familiar in the Progressives' deep worry that, despite living in an era of relative peace and prosperity, something had gone seriously wrong in the internal life of the nation."

The word "neoprogressivism" has arisen as a 1990s counterpoint to the "neoconservatism" of the 1970s. If the neoconservatives reacted to the failures—both real and perceived—of 1960s politics, the neoprogressives are the product of failures from 1980 onward. Virtually all neoprogressives share an aller-



gy to an endless reprise of either 1960s cultural politics or 1980s antigovernment politics—or worse, a continuing battle between the two. This leads to two other unifying insights: that the solutions to the current crises will require active government; but that the social and economic disruptions of this era also require a strengthening of civic and community institutions outside of government.

The neoprogressives cover a wide spectrum. Both the Democratic Leadership Council and the pro-labor forces at the new Campaign for America's Future recently issued manifestos point-

ing to the powerful parallels between this period and the reformist wave that began with Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson (pushed along, it might be added, by Eugene Debs). They agree that the internationalization of the economy demands new approaches to maintaining middle-class living standards, achieving higher growth rates, and preventing large increases in inequality that would undermine the social bargains on which democracy rests. Both documents also speak of the declining loyalty of employer to employee, of the impact of the new economy on families, of the need for a revival of the sorts of international economic institutions that did so much to spur expansion after the Second World War. President Clinton himself now speaks regularly of the early Progressives and of how their task of writing new rules for a radically new period is now our own.

### THE NEOPROGRESSIVE CHALLENGE

But there is far more agreement on the need for a progressive departure than on the contents of a new progressive program. This uncertainty is reflected in the caution of the congressional Democrats' "Families First" agenda and in the exquisite care taken by the writers of this year's Democratic platform to avoid any controversial commitments or challenging propositions. (The most controversial line in the platform, a repetition of Clinton's declaration that "the era of big government is over," is less a challenge than a rhetorical capitulation to the other side.)

There are, moreover, large differences in how the various factions traveling under a neoprogressive banner describe the challenges of the next decade. The Democratic Leadership Council manifesto devotes much energy to criticizing bureaucracy and other "old" approaches to solving social problems. It is critical of "bureaucratic" solutions and, implicitly, of public employee unions and their resistance to change. The America's Future manifesto concentrates much of its fire on the behavior of corporations. It is implicitly critical of moderate progressives for failing to face up to the ways in which the social

problems the moderates describe are exacerbated by the structure of the economy. These broad differences point to large arguments to come.

But will these battles cripple the effort to revive the progressive tradition? They need not, as long as the partisans of various visions admit that they agree on certain propositions—in polemical circumstances, admitting agreement can be the hardest thing of all—and find their way toward a plausible program for the near term. But in the long run, some of the differences need to be resolved, lest the neoprogressive movement deliver nothing more than rhetoric.

**F**or example, neoprogressives of all stripes argue for higher growth rates. This is not a trivial achievement. Some friends of the environment were once given to making arguments against growth, on the grounds that continued economic expansion would threaten ecological balances. Now, many environmentalists argue that saving the environment may actually require decent levels of growth, especially in Third World nations. The move within the environmental community toward the idea of "sustainable growth" is more than a rhetorical shift. It reflects an understanding that growth is a moral necessity and a powerful spur to social justice.

But what spurs growth? The Keynesian calls for a less phobic policy toward inflation from the Federal Reserve or an explicit acceptance of moderate federal deficits (or both) are now controversial. But they could become less so over time. On inflation, the evidence will matter. If the continued downward pressure on wages keeps inflation at bay, the case for lower interest rates to promote more robust growth will be overwhelming.

On the deficit, the federal government could discover that state governments have had it right all along: It's reasonable to go into debt for long-term purposes—the construction of roads, schools, environmental facilities, and the like—while keeping the books in balance for short-term expenditures. Thus the arguments from many quarters (including Progressive Policy Institute Vice President Robert Shapiro) for the division of federal spending into two budgets: a consumption budget, which should stay in balance except in times of deep recession, and an investment budget, which can reasonably

It's reasonable to go  
into debt for long-  
term purposes . . .

be financed by long-term debt.

Neoproggressives agree on the need to invest more heavily in job training programs, more aggressive school-to-work programs (to create closer links between high schools and the job market), and other efforts to move workers to better-paying parts of the economy. On many of these ideas, neoproggressives will find strong allies in a business community that is often strapped for educated and skilled workers. This is one area where voucher approaches are promising. In all likelihood, voucher programs would have the beneficial effect of strengthening the country's system of community colleges, since evidence from the past suggests that they are likely to produce the best training and job transition programs.

But designing job training programs that work is easier said than done. And with the global labor market creating fierce competition even among the most skilled members of the workforce, can job training ever be enough? Training and education are popular because they make intuitive sense, but also because they raise no large questions about the structure of the economy. Far more controversial will be the debate over the role and future of the labor movement, and the debate over how to represent the interests of employees in new economic circumstances. It is easy to agree that old models of representation need to be reinvented. Working at Microsoft is different in important ways from working at U.S. Steel or General Motors. The service economy is different from the industrial economy. When only one private-sector worker in ten belongs to a traditional union, it is time to explore alternative means of worker representation. But it's also true that the labor movement has begun to adapt itself and is still one of the most powerful instruments available to employees seeking a voice at work. Thus a modest suggestion: that labor's centrist critics pause long enough to realize that their main goal, a more equitable distribution of opportunity, requires a revitalized labor movement; and that labor's supporters accept, in turn, that there is more than one way to represent workers and their interests.

Similarly, neoproggressives share an understanding that the global market creates a need for strengthen-

ing international agreements on labor rights and the environment, and for new compacts to promote economic growth. In the aftermath of World War II, the democratic countries created a remarkable trade and currency regime that led to a period of rapid and sustained economic growth accompanied by an expansion of social justice. There will be much dispute over how (and even whether) this can happen again. There will be arguments about how global regulation can be achieved, how broad it should be, and how it can be enforced. But even to begin this argument—to suggest that it is not, in principle, impossible to accomplish what the postwar leadership did—is to suggest that we need not accept slow growth and expanding inequality as inevitable.

There will, necessarily, be great dispute over the organization of world trade. McKinley-era protectionism is not an option, but trade is not now and never will be entirely "free." Different countries, at different stages of development, will pursue their own economic policies for their own reasons. Those pushing to expand world trade will

necessarily argue over the best ways to do so. Should the United States pursue more trade agreements with Latin America? Or should it turn instead toward Europe, where the political climate is more hospitable to America's progressive regulatory and social welfare tradition? What is clear is that without some strengthening of international standards and enforcement mechanisms, the race to the bot-

tom in labor and environmental conditions will continue, dragging down with it what is left of the social democratic bargain.

**T**he debate over domestic social policy will also be fierce. In principle, all neoproggressives are open to experimentation and to the reform and reconstruction of the public sector. All accept the need for strong systems of social insurance and for expanding rather than contracting programs for the poor. In practice, there will be great fights over how to change the big social programs, especially Medicare, to accommodate the baby boom; over the role of public employee unions; and over how social programs are best delivered. Is the primary goal of the

... and it's time  
to strengthen  
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the environment.



Progressive tradition to build more responsive public institutions, or to achieve greater equality of access through voucher-style programs? This debate will be especially difficult on public education (an area where I, for one, would dissent from many liberals and argue that voucher experiments for low-income children should be welcomed).

Still, in most other areas, the vouchers versus institution-building argument is not a fight over principles. It is simply a debate over means. As Robert Kuttner has argued, vouchers are usually a "second order question." The first issue is to decide whether or not to use public resources to solve a particular problem. If public resources are needed, what is the best way to deploy them?

President Clinton's decision to sign a deeply flawed welfare bill may be the most disturbing cautionary tale of all. In principle, Democrats and a large group of moderate Republicans agreed on what constituted genuine welfare reform: A new system would embody a commitment to work and family stability. In exchange, the government would expand, not contract, help for the poor in the form of education, job training, child care, and guarantees of health coverage. As David Ellwood wrote recently in these pages ["Welfare Reform As I Knew It," *TAP*, May-June 1996], there was a large opening for such an approach during the first two Clinton years. The opportunity was squandered, not only by the administration but also by many liberals who recognized neither the popular pressure for reform nor the urgency of fixing a system that was failing the poor. This, in turn, opened the way for the deep cuts enacted under a false flag of reform.

If any good can come out of this terrible bill, it is that the death of the once noble but now stigmatized word "welfare" may make it easier for advocates for the poor to overcome the old demagoguery. But the problems this bill creates are huge; merely restoring the spending it cuts will be difficult. To make any progress, supporters of practical generosity will need to accept Ellwood's insight about the importance of work and family stability.

There may be even less consensus on health care. Even among those who continue to favor national action to guarantee universal coverage, there remain disagreements over the merits of building on the existing system of private insurance, of constructing a government-sponsored sin-

gle-payer system—or of trying to create, as the Clintons did, a mixed system to harness certain market efficiencies to a set of government guarantees. The 1996 Democratic platform and the Families First agenda endorsed only the most minimal of health care reforms in an effort to evade such questions. But giving up on universal coverage makes neither moral nor policy sense. And there is nothing wrong with bowing to political and practical necessity by pursuing this goal in steps (for example, by pushing first for universal coverage for children). The achievement of each step would constitute a substantial success, and would reduce the difficulty of finishing the job.

**M**erely to list these disputes over fundamentals is to suggest that while American voters are eager for a new turn in American politics, there is nothing automatic about the success of a particular brand of progressivism. Potential allies in a new progressive project could quickly become adversaries—or, alternatively, could find agreement on only the narrowest and least-inspiring set of reforms.

Nonetheless, what is clear from the turbulence of the last four years is that American voters would be powerfully attracted to a political movement devoted to using government to ease their economic insecurities and to expand their capacity to take advantage of the new era. They would welcome a debate focused less on "big" or "small" government and more on "better" or "more appropriate" government. Inaction did not work for the Democrats. An antigovernment program did not work for the Republicans. You might argue that progressive government is the one alternative that hasn't been tried.

America's Progressive tradition has many flaws. At its worst, it could be excessively bureaucratic, too beholden to experts, too wary of mass political participation, indifferent or hostile to racial justice, uneasy about the ethnic mosaic created by immigration. But at its best, the Progressive tradition was powerfully democratic. It saw free government as the ally rather than the enemy of liberty, and as an instrument for solving problems that would go unsolved absent political action. That tradition is not only alive and well; it now has its largest opening in three decades. Neoproggressives should have their arguments. But they should not squander their opportunity. □

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# PRIVATE HEROISM AND PUBLIC PURPOSE

BY STANLEY B. GREENBERG

**T**he progressive economic narrative today begins with the stagnation and growing inequality that characterizes this period of change and possibility. That seems a natural enough starting point. Throughout this century, progressive movements have found their purpose in capitalism's failure to deliver on its promises to ordinary citizens. Once again, this is the central challenge of our own time.

While the best-educated and global entrepreneurs are prospering, the great majority of voters face stagnant incomes; blue-collar workers face income decline. According to the congressional Democrats' policy chief, David Obey of Wisconsin, this has pushed "frustration to new peaks because families have run out of ways to cope."

Unfortunately, the public has been little moved by the progressive analysis and expressions of concern. Overall, voters are somewhat more inclined to trust the Republicans on the economy (43 to 36 percent, according to an Emily's List national survey in May 1996), and within the working-class and lower-middle-class electorate—the presumptive audience for a progressive critique of the economy—the Republicans are clearly ascendant. White, blue-collar men think the Republicans are much better at handling the economy (by 11 points, 48 percent to 37 percent). But even white women in blue-collar, sales, and clerical jobs and other low-wage occupations favor the Republicans on these material issues: by 8 points on handling the economy and 14 on ensuring economic security. What is going on?

The problem, as my focus-group research for the AFL-CIO and the Service Employees International Union indicates, is that progressives do not adequately understand the lives and struggles of working- and middle-class families. It is not that these voters share the

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conservatives' view of a successful market economy. The working middle class knows all too well that the economy is stagnant for them—that growth is too anemic to generalize its bounty and that jobs no longer offer the pay increases or advancement that raise living standards. But working Americans have hardly given up. They have thrown themselves into a personal and somewhat lonely struggle to pull their families up the ladder to a better life, despite the income stagnation that surrounds them. They are scrambling to work longer hours and more jobs, to get skills training, to form independent businesses. They are drawing upon their own attitudes and values, their family, and church. As they see things, they get little help from an economy that seems content with flaccid wage increases, from employers who are no longer loyal to their employees, or from a government that is indifferent to the ordinary citizen except at tax time.

The central drama of our economy is the success of working people making a better life for their families, despite the odds, despite the stagnation and the loneliness of the struggle. Working America is full of heroes. Progressives, however, continue to tell a bleak story about slow income growth, inequality, corporate irresponsibility, about terrible odds facing working people—all of which is true. In the process, progressives have failed to notice that the real story is the heroism—the personal struggle of working people who are succeeding despite the odds.

Whether progressives recapture the loyalties of working America depends on whether they understand this drama and the heroism, and fashion a narrative and program that places the lives of working people once again at the center of progressive politics.

#### THE LADDER: THE PARADOX OF LIVING STANDARDS

These noncollege-educated working- and middle-class voters believe their wages are stagnant and they are scrambling to pay the bills, just as the progressives expect. The real world of working

people is a world without raises. The notion of stagnant “real wages” is not a theoretical concept. For the mass of downscale voters, it is simply the way the world now works: One does not get raises that matter, unless one works longer hours, a higher-paying shift, or an additional job.

Downscale voters see themselves as caught in the “money situation.” These individuals live in an economic world full of rising taxes, prices, and bills that create debt and deplete savings. Groceries are going up, and so are the co-payments for health care; and, of course, “the taxes are going up, everything’s just getting higher and higher.” So the measure of well-being in this new economy has been reduced to the simple con-

clusion that “we’ve been paying our bills,” “we’ve been making the bills.” When you are covering the bills, you are successfully caring for your family.

For a majority of these noncollege voters—55 percent—the goal in life is simply “security” or “self-sufficiency.” Another quarter want “a better life,” but that may be no more than getting ahead of the bills. Barely 20 percent talk about “prosperity.” The economic horizons have been lowered because life for working- and middle-class America has become “a scramble.” In the words of a noncollege-educated woman from Wisconsin:

Nine years ago, I was getting paid \$8.50, \$9.00 an hour. That was a union job. I’m really sickened when I think of jobs and the possibility that I would have to go and possibly to a . . . temporary agency because that is the most insulting job that you can have, in pay, dignity, and it’s like what you have to do to raise your family. And I know, there are times I had three jobs just to raise my 20-year old.

People are clearly piecing together multiple jobs, working longer hours and overtime, juggling bills, starting new jobs, and starting new businesses to try to create good times for themselves. They are able to scramble because the economy is generating a lot of jobs, but the result is not “good times,” just the opportunity to scramble.

The central drama of our economy is the success of working people making a better life for their families despite the odds.

Yet despite the raiseless economy, the money situation, and the scramble, these working- and middle-class voters believe their overall economic position is improving and taking them just above the average American. That is the paradox of living standards and the key to understanding how people view our current economy. On the one hand, they believe that people no longer get wage increases that matter at work and that the overall economy is failing to lift all boats. On the other hand, they believe they are achieving a higher living standard and better life for their families, because of their own personal efforts and the choices and sacrifices that they are making.

**I**n our focus groups, we presented the participants with a ladder, with zero representing the lowest possible living standard, and ten, the highest rung, representing the highest; the fifth rung was the midpoint. Participants were asked to locate themselves right now and then to locate themselves five years from now. They were asked to locate the average American right now and, again, five years from now. Finally, they were asked to locate where their children would stand at a comparable point in life.

Both the noncollege men and noncollege women place themselves just above the average (at 5.5 and 5.8, respectively). But more important, they do not see themselves as stuck. They expect to see their living standards rise over the next five years—for the noncollege men, up to 6.7, and for noncollege women, to 7.3. Those are big jumps and, on the face of it, not very consistent with the reported stagnation of wages and struggles with bills and money.

At the same time, these noncollege voters view the “average American” as just below average—about 4.7 on the ladder. But unlike the survey participants, the average American is not going anywhere. In five years, he or she rises only a fraction of a rung to the exact midpoint, 5.0. The living standards of average Americans are seen as simply stagnant.

The noncollege participants expect their children to reach a point close to where they themselves are now, though usually below their own expectations for the next five years. That is not a bleak scenario, though it hardly fits historic notions of successive generations, each a step closer to realizing the “American dream.”

With the odds so long and the stagnation so per-

vasive, how does it happen that people believe they are achieving a better life for their families?

We asked people to explain their family’s ascent up the ladder, and they describe a personal and somewhat heroic narrative of people struggling on their own and making choices that enable their family to achieve a better life. This has little to do with economic growth or a rising median income. This is about individual effort that indeed can produce more material prosperity.

- People expect to raise their living standards by working longer hours, doing overtime, or working at multiple jobs.

- Many intend to get the education, skills, or certification to get a job that pays more.

- Many think about becoming self-employed, creating their own business, or helping their spouse who is trying to set up a business on the side.

- Nearly everybody presumes that when the children reach school age, the women (or wives) will go back to work and will be able to bring in more money.

- Later on, when the children have “moved out of the house” or when the “kids are raised,” the women will have the “freedom to take a job.”

- When the kids graduate from college, the tuition bills will suddenly drop.

- At some point in life, the mortgage will be paid off, and people will have a lot more money each month.

One has a sense that this is a lifetime narrative that people fully understand, even early in the process. They can raise the living standards of their families by acting responsibly, joining the labor force or working more hours, seeing the children grow up to adulthood and independence, and paying off a mortgage and owning something. The end point is a retirement that no longer requires that kind of scramble.

## DRAWING ON THEIR OWN RESOURCES

There is no sign in this discourse of government or political parties or organizations. What people have going for them in this economy are their own wits.

First, they have their own attitude toward work. About a third mention dependability, energy, a willingness to work hard, and an ability to work with people: “I don’t give up. I’ve got a lot of

vision, I make things happen, one way or another. Usually, anyway" (noncollege man, Georgia); "I'm there, I'm on time, and I'm not out, I'm not sick, I'm capable, I don't fool around, I do my job" (noncollege woman, New Jersey).

Second, people rely on their families—to support them, to provide moral support, to carry the main work load, to provide a supplemental income, to make it possible to get more training or education. "My husband's a very hard worker. The job that he has offers a lot of overtime, so he's really working hard" (noncollege woman, New Jersey); "That my husband has a very dependable job, and my strong faith in the Lord" (noncollege woman, Georgia); "The wife's still very employable, so we're not hurting in that sense" (noncollege man, Georgia); "My family, my wife, my little boy. Uh, at least I have a job. I revolve my life around my family and, you know, if I can make them happy, then that's, that makes my life complete" (noncollege man, California).

Third, a 10 percent to 15 percent slice of these noncollege participants point to their niches in small business or their ability to work independently or for themselves. That enables them to escape the job market and, they hope, its wage limitations. Participants talk about starting small businesses, getting out on your own, being your own boss. These independent economic activities have a broad range—from opening a bookstore to providing child care in the home, cleaning houses, addressing and folding envelopes at home, landscaping, selling Herbal Life, and building a career in real estate or as a stockbroker.

Finally, people talk with great intensity about educating themselves or their families. It is hard to overestimate how important education and skills training are to these noncollege voters—perhaps the most important strategy for people to gain an advantage in this stagnant economy. For a quarter of the participants, education is the primary strategy for getting a better job and a higher wage; lack of education is considered the biggest thing holding people back in their current careers and jobs; and schooling and education, particularly a college education, stand out from everything else as people's best hope for their children doing better in life.

The focus on education carries across gender lines, though the men tend to focus more narrowly and practically on skills training and computers: "I went back to school for air conditioning and refrigeration"; "I am constantly reading computer books"; "I've learned technical things, like I've learned drafting"; "I'm in data processing . . . you have a better chance than . . . assembly line operators." The women, on the other hand, tend to focus on education in general and the use of education as a route back into the full-time job market.

People become even more graphic in speaking about their lack of education as a primary obstacle to their making a good living. The college degree is a great divide, and most of these working- and lower-middle-class voters find themselves on the other side, working very hard to make a living: "I didn't further my education. When I was working I couldn't get a good job because I didn't have any real good skills, but I consider myself an intelligent person, even though I don't have any of those degrees" (noncollege woman, Georgia); "My husband doesn't have a college education, so he's a blue-collar worker. So he's got to kind of bust butt to get ahead. Unfortunately, we don't get a break. We're that middle class" (noncollege woman, New Jersey).

These noncollege participants are obsessed with education for their children as the one thing that can break them out of the current economic probabilities. One noncollege man in Georgia talked about his daughter giving up on college to join her new husband at the Marine base. Now she has two children and is delivering newspapers for \$8.50 an hour. "I didn't want it to go through," he observed, "because I knew that it would affect her schooling, and that, in turn, will affect her earning potential these days." It is education that enables the children to reach a different point on the ladder.

**HANDS THAT DON'T HELP**

This struggle to rise above the average is highly personal. It depends on people's qualities and attitudes, on their personal determination to improve themselves and get an education. It depends on the support and work of family members. Without those things, one would struggle like the rest of America, not getting anywhere. But the resources and strategies are private; as one of the men bluntly put it, "unless you're willing to watch out for yourself or do something for yourself, nobody else is really going to help you." When asked who is on their side, about a third of the participants look to family, about 10 percent look to friends, and about a quarter look to the church.

People have little expectation that civic organizations will rise to their defense or advance their interests. Barely anybody thinks of unions.

Barely one in ten of the participants mention political leaders as a force on their side. But it is not just an oversight, as people focus on their private lives and choices. People in these interviews go out of their way, without prompting, to point out that political leaders have failed them, that they are supposed to be helpful, but that you cannot depend on them to make things better for ordinary people. People want a popular politics to help them, but unfortunately the politicians are too busy helping themselves. That is why one must look elsewhere: "We go to church every Sunday, and we believe that God will provide. My parents are there for me, his mother's there for him. And I'd like to think the people that we elect are there for me too, but sometimes I'm not too sure" (noncollege woman, New Jersey).

When we asked what is holding them back, these working- and middle-class voters offer a highly politicized response—the politicians, government, and, above all, "the tax man." People see themselves struggling to get ahead against the odds. Government is not there with a helping hand—it's there with its hands in people's pockets, taking their money for taxes, sometimes for welfare. About half of the participants volunteer something about government and politics holding them back, with the emphasis on government, politicians, taxes, and the Congress, in that order.

An overwhelming two-thirds think the government makes things harder, rather than easier, for people. This instinctive aversion to government is not about philosophy, it is about money: "They take too much of my money" (noncollege woman, New Jersey); "Since they have their nose in, it's harder, because they want more money" (noncollege woman, California); "It's taxes, taxes, taxes" (noncollege man, Georgia).

Employers fare better than the government. Sizable majorities of these noncollege male voters say their employers make life "easier" rather than "harder" for them, though that seems very much a pragmatic response related to work. Virtually every one of the participants described themselves as "loyal" to their employers and companies, but a majority of the men thought their employers are not loyal to them. Women were apt to think their employers were loyal, but that reflects the greater

tendency of these married women to work part-time or in small businesses. Clearly, these working people were sensitive to a new sense of insecurity: "The days of the kind of respect that you used to get from your employers are long gone and hard to find. A lot of them feel as though . . . we are a dime a dozen, and we are easily replaced. So there is no sense of loyalty" (noncollege man, Wisconsin); "I think companies . . . don't have a heart, they don't have emotions. They have bottom lines" (noncollege woman, Georgia).

Much of the discussion now takes these disloyal practices as the norm, maybe a necessity, given the changing, competitive economy: "I can't blame them at all, but . . . if they don't need you, you're out the door" (noncollege woman, Georgia). Whatever the motivation, the result is the same—working people on their own.

### SELF-RELIANCE AND VIRTUE

It should not be surprising, then, that these people think of themselves as virtuous. They have assumed responsibility for the bills, the children, going to work, and getting an education, without much help from anybody else. Above all, they have been responsible: 80 percent to 90 percent of the noncollege men and women say "responsibility" is the most important value. In almost all cases, the noncollege participants combine the value of responsibility with the value of "hard work" or "self-reliance." This reflects their lives.

The grievances of the downscale electorate are rooted in behavior that offends these virtues. They see the world through this prism: those who support their personal efforts and those that undermine them; those who respect their virtue and those who disregard or take advantage of it; those who live by the same values and those who do not. It is the tension between virtue and grievance—rather than between labor and capital—that animates the working- and lower-middle-class electorate and that creates political energy. Political and economic messages will have to be rooted in this discourse about virtue if they are to capture the attention of downscale America.

The "bad guys" are those who do not respect the struggle and the virtues of working- and middle-class America. Government is a big part of the story, though not all of it. Almost a third of the men immediately point to the government, bureaucrats, and taxes; almost 20 percent cite Dole, Gingrich, and the



Congress; almost 10 percent cite Clinton. More than half the men, then, begin with politicized responses about the "bad" forces. The women are somewhat less political and less certain about who the bad guys are. A number of the men and women talk about welfare as counterpoised to the "good forces," which folds into the general sense of grievance. And almost a third of the men and about 20 percent of the women focus on big business, the rich and powerful, and the greedy as "bad guys."

The "good guys," on the other hand, are the working- and middle-class people, the people who work, who are self-reliant, and who take responsibility; they include the small business people who put everything on the line: "The good guys are the guys out there working and busting their tushes, and the bad guys are the ones that are spending all the money that they should be trying to save to pay off their debts" (noncollege woman, California); "Nothing is handed. Middle class has to work for it too, but nothing is handed to us" (noncollege woman, New Jersey).

#### THE PROGRESSIVE ECONOMIC NARRATIVE

The starting point in any successful narrative on the economy begins with the heroes—working- and middle-class people who are killing themselves to make a better life for their families, despite the odds.

The conservatives have been winning this battle to gain the support of working people because they, at least, seem able to identify with the personal initiative and responsibility and with the progress people are making. But the conservatives have not won over working people entirely, because they cannot acknowledge the seriousness of the odds and the costs people bear to make things better for their families. People are succeeding not because the economy is growing or because employers are raising people's pay. Conservatives cannot see the drama and poignancy of this personal struggle because they cannot allow themselves to acknowledge that markets and business are failing to generalize their prosperity.

Progressives have also taken little notice of the heroes and their successful efforts to make a better life for their families, but that is where their narrative must start. Progressives have relished talking about the bleakness of the economy for working people and presumed that was the end of the story. We now understand that it is only the beginning.

Our interviews suggest four areas where progressives have an opportunity to change the terms of this discourse:

**Growth.** There are strong currents within both progressive and conservative political and economic thinking emphasizing the country's ability to grow at a greater rate and thus lower unemployment and raise real incomes. Obviously, Jeff Faux, Lester Thurow, and James Galbraith offer radically different prescriptions from Jack Kemp and Steve Forbes. Yet all are trying, in effect, to change the rules of the game, so that heroism is not the only route to a better life.

But the two-decade-long stagnation of incomes and the pervasiveness of the personal struggle have left the public cautious about the likelihood of a general rise in prosperity. Real growth would no doubt drastically affect this story, but for now, downscale voters are very doubtful. People do believe there are more jobs available today, but they scorn the idea that there has been growth—which likely implies something headier, like real income growth. "Somebody's lying. . . . The economy is growing? Where is it growing?"; "It makes me feel our economy is nothing but a joke"; "But the economy is not growing for the regular people."

Progressives need to make the case for real growth and push economic policymakers to create it. The citizen in a growing country may not feel so alone and may be able to contemplate what people can achieve together.

**Money.** Absent "growth" that changes the odds, working people are looking for governmental actions that make it easier, rather than harder, as they try to bring their families up the ladder. Narrowly understood, this is about money—how to put more money in people's pockets as they try to do the right thing. Republicans understand this micro approach to the economic narrative, which is why they want to cut people's taxes. How else can we explain Republican candidate Bob Dole at the gas pump, promising voters another 19 dollars a year?

Progressives have an opportunity to talk about enhancement of people's personal resources to increase the probability that this scramble will succeed. Broadly understood, this is a narrative that can encompass schooling, skills training, affordable college, middle-class tax cuts, health insurance, pensions, Medicare, and Social Security. On all

these policies that aid people in their lifetime economic strategies, Democrats have a strong, sometimes overwhelming advantage over the Republicans. But the policies need a story that shows how they add up to a progressive effort to help working- and middle-class Americans make a better life in this new economy.

**Not on your own.** The ordinary voter is close to being able to recite a mantra about government: It is too big and expensive, wasteful and bureaucratic, and it only messes things up—so cut spending and taxes and let the people spend their own money.

There is room, however, to educate voters about the role of government in making people's lives easier and safer. Instinctively, these voters think the opposite, but it does not take a lot of argument to move many of these voters to think differently about the issue. We read the respondents a simple list: minimum wage, 40-hour work week, COBRA, workplace safety rules, family and medical leave, college loans, and the right to organize unions. (We did not include Medicare or Social Security.) After hearing it, 18 percent of the noncollege men and 36 percent of the noncollege women changed their minds about government: "Maybe it's something that a lot of those I have just taken for granted, like \$4.25 an hour or having set wages and having COBRA, because that has been around for awhile and I'm familiar with it" (noncollege woman, Georgia); "They do help each of us, ensure each of us safety and security so you're not eating tainted food and you're not working in an environment that is toxic without precautions being taken" (noncollege woman, Georgia); "All of the things that the government is regulating and God forbid, without some of those things, we really would be in deep doo-doo" (noncollege woman, New Jersey).

While Democrats have been shy about defending government, their silence has no doubt left voters more alone than they really are. It has also left conservatives free to savage an abstracted, burdensome government. Progressives clearly have an opportunity to rebuild the legitimacy of government that is less costly and intrusive but that is also capable of helping people advance themselves and make better lives for themselves in a rapidly changing world.

**Democratic politics.** These working- and middle-class voters think they are on their own, but it is not out of choice. Politicians have abandoned them.

The government works for the special interests and has forgotten the ordinary people who are supposed to be the center of the story. In the absence of a democratic politics, these voters are indeed willing to go it alone and settle for lower taxes.

The heroism is not about a desire to go it alone. Yet with government and parties so indifferent to ordinary citizens, one's time is better spent in private solutions. Why should they believe that this government, Congress, and class of politicians are capable of doing the right thing on the economy, taxes, or health care? To allow people to give something other than the obvious answer, progressives will have to fight to renew democratic politics and government. Then people can imagine once again that they have the power to improve the odds, not just as exceptional heroes, but as hard-working people trying to make a better life for their families.

In the end, this must be more than a narrative, because if it is only a story or rhetoric or empathy, the electorate's hard-won skepticism will win out again—and rightly so. People have become increasingly cynical about politicians who seem to honor their experience but in the end do not deliver much except taxes.

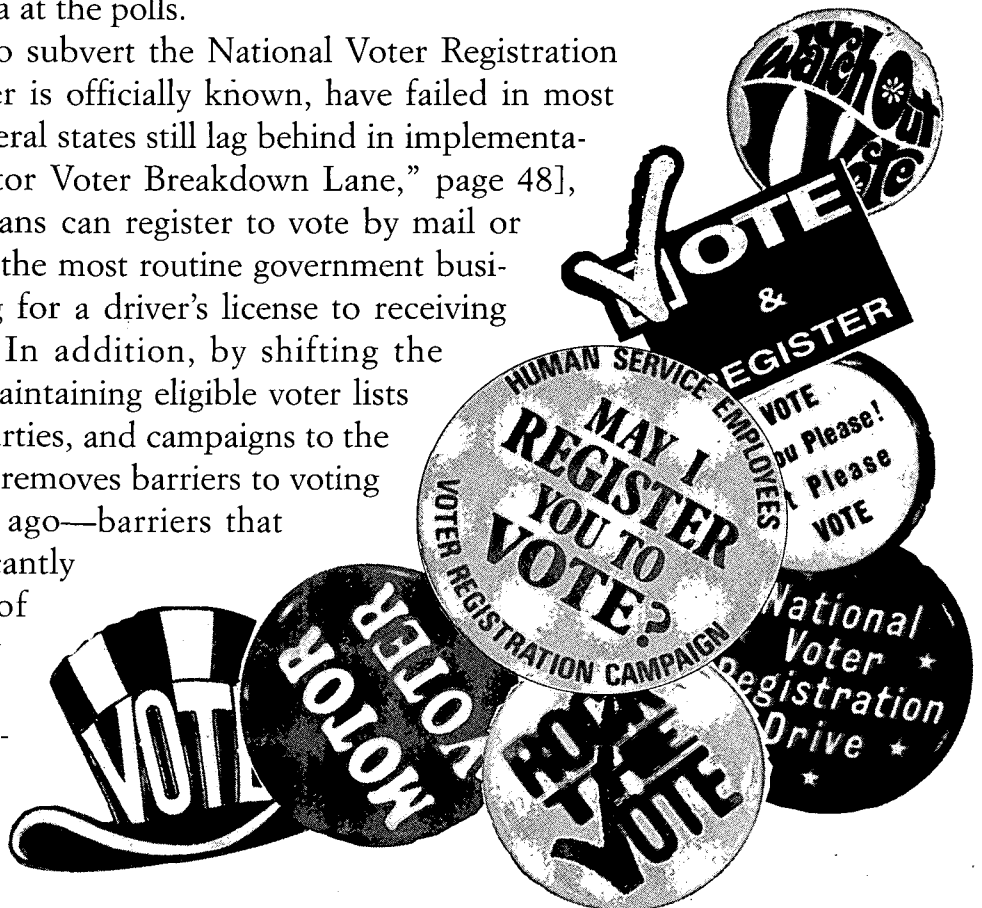
Four years ago, the Democrats honored the "forgotten middle class" and rekindled people's hopes that the rules could be changed—that economic growth would be so robust that people would not have to work harder and harder for less and less, that they would be able to get affordable health insurance, that their tax dollars would not be wasted on welfare, and that the ordinary citizen would be able to walk down the corridors of power again. The Republicans reaped the rewards in 1994 when the public concluded that those hopes had been false. That the Republicans in Congress had worked mightily to kill the Clinton program did not matter as much as the anger with Democrats for urging people to believe things could be different. Working- and middle-class voters have not turned to the Republicans; they have turned to themselves. But that lonely struggle and worldview—working people on their own against the economy, with the government more an obstacle than an ally—favors the Republican, social-Darwinist view of the world. Progressives will win over working people only if they offer a narrative and a program that allows people, short of heroism, to achieve a better life for their families. □

# MOTOR VOTER OR MOTIVATED VOTER?

BY MARSHALL GANZ

**W**hen Bill Clinton signed the 1993 Motor Voter bill, mandating states to offer on-the-spot voter registration at various government agencies, Republicans in California and several other states sought to undermine the new law by withholding critical funding and, later, by seeking court injunctions against its implementation. Although these officials justified their actions by warning that Motor Voter would increase voter fraud, partisan concerns may have been on their minds. Since nonvoters tend to be poorer than voters, many conservatives feared—just as many liberals hoped—that Motor Voter would produce a Democratic bonanza at the polls.

These attempts to subvert the National Voter Registration Act, as Motor Voter is officially known, have failed in most cases. Although several states still lag behind in implementation [see “The Motor Voter Breakdown Lane,” page 48], today most Americans can register to vote by mail or when they conduct the most routine government business, from applying for a driver’s license to receiving public assistance. In addition, by shifting the responsibility for maintaining eligible voter lists from individuals, parties, and campaigns to the states, Motor Voter removes barriers to voting imposed 100 years ago—barriers that contributed significantly to the low levels of twentieth-century U.S. voter turnout and unrepresentativeness of the electorate. No matter what the



electoral impact today, this achievement brings us closer to the norm of universal voter registration typical of other industrial democracies.

But those who believe that Motor Voter will on its own increase turnout significantly are mistaken, as are those who anticipate an automatic windfall for the Democratic Party. While the law removes

significant obstacles to participation, the precipitous decline in turnout since the 1960s reflects a growing indifference to politics, not a lack of access to the voting booth. In

the short term at least, Motor Voter will make the biggest difference to otherwise motivated citizens for whom registration is a significant obstacle to voting: those who are under 30 or who move frequently, not the poor. The former two groups' partisan orientation does not differ substantially from that of the electorate as a whole.

What's more, these new voters will have a disproportionate impact in states where Democrats already struggle—states like Florida, Georgia, and Arkansas, all of which have long histories of restrictive registration laws.

The good news for progressives is that Motor Voter does offer political strategists new opportunities to mobilize nonvoters by making the rolls more inclusive, creating more accurate lists of potential voters, and enrolling more young people than at any time since 18-year-olds got the vote in 1972. Yet the prospects for major increases in turnout and energizing Democratic politics hinge entirely on how—or, more precisely, on whether—organizers make use of these new opportunities.

### WHY PEOPLE DON'T VOTE

Political scientists attribute the ups and downs in voting behavior to changes in the *cost* of voting to citizens (or their access to the resources to incur these costs) and in the *motivation* of citizens to vote. On the one hand, cumbersome registration

procedures inhibit voting by imposing on prospective participants costs of time, effort, attention, and, in some cases, money. On the other hand, the effect of these costs on turnout depends on how motivated to vote people are in the first place: Do they identify with one of the major parties? Do they believe government will respond to them? Are they interested in a particular election? Do they think it matters who wins? Do they think it will be close? And, most important, is anyone mobilizing them to turn out?

In the early twentieth century, newly imposed voter registration procedures (higher cost) combined with the reduced effectiveness of partisan mobilization (lower motivation) to yield the first sharp declines in U.S. voter turnout. State legislatures enacted restrictive registration laws in an explicit attempt to limit partisan mobilization of “undesirable” and “irresponsible” elements. In the North, the targets were urban, mostly Democratic political machines that drew electoral support from recent immigrants and their children of voting age. Registration “reform” was packaged with other antiparty measures. These included candidate selection by primary instead of nominating convention as well as the use of the Australian ballot—the government-issued nonpartisan voting forms we use today—which replaced voting “tickets” parties handed out to voters at the polls. In the South, voter registration was packaged with Jim Crow laws including literacy tests, poll taxes, and “grandfather clauses” that barred most African Americans—and many poor whites—from the polls and effectively transformed the South into a one-party system.

As a result of the effect of these “reforms” on partisan competition, voter turnout in presidential elections plummeted from 79 percent of the eligible voting-age population in 1896 to just 49 percent in 1920. In the North turnout declined from 86 percent to 55 percent between 1896 and 1920, while in the South it fell from 57 percent to 22 percent. A southern post-Civil War peak of 75 percent had been achieved in 1876, before the withdrawal of federal troops in 1877. Although the 1920 electorate included women for the first time, the citizens who voted were a wealthier, whiter, and more educated slice of the public than before.

In the 1930s, however, despite restrictive registration procedures, intensive new partisan efforts motivated increasing numbers of voters to turn out.



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Beginning with Democratic presidential candidate Al Smith's mobilization of urban Catholic voters in 1928 and continuing through the industrial-union drives of the 1930s, turnout began to rise as the voting electorate became more broadly representative. In the North, turnout climbed from a low of 55 percent in 1920 to a peak of 73 percent by 1940. In the South, turnout had fallen to 19 percent by 1924 and did not begin to climb substantially until African Americans began regaining the right to vote after World War II. Southern turnout reached 38 percent by 1952 and peaked at 52 percent in 1968. For the nation as a whole, although nineteenth-century levels of turnout remained out of reach, a new peak of 65 percent was reached by 1960.

Beginning in 1964, voter turnout again began to decline, but in a way strikingly different from that of the earlier part of the century. Although turnout fell to 50.1 percent by 1988, it declined not as registration procedures were tightened, but as they were *liberalized*. Beginning with federal restoration of voting rights to African Americans, many states enacted laws allowing "mail-in" registration, expanded absentee balloting, and adopted versions of what would become the federal Motor Voter law. Government actions to reduce the cost of voting were overwhelmed, however, by even sharper reductions in voter motivation—a loss of motivation that originated in the political upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s and was compounded by the development of new "capital intensive" campaign technologies that tended to limit partisan mobilization to those already most likely to vote. By 1992, the 54 percent of Americans with family incomes over \$30,000 a year cast 77 percent of the ballots.

Despite major partisan registration efforts in 1984 that increased registration by 2 percentage points to 71.8 percent of voting-age population, turnout rose by only 0.7 of a percentage point. It was not until 1992 that turnout rose substantially—by 5 percentage points to 55.2 percent. The difference was an electorate motivated by a close and

compelling presidential contest, according to a study by political scientists Steven Rosenstone, John Mark Hansen, Paul Freedman, and Marguerite Grabarek.

## DOES MOTOR VOTER REGISTER?

Motor Voter represents the most recent attempt to make voting easier by removing restrictions imposed in the early years of this century. Its promise is that it specifically targets those groups now least likely to be registered voters—the mobile, the young, the poor, and citizens of color—by linking registration to particular agencies with whom these groups deal. For example, although 89 percent of 25- to 29-year-olds have driver's licenses, only 65 percent claim to be registered and 54 percent to be voters, according to a Department of Transportation study. In the course of a five-year

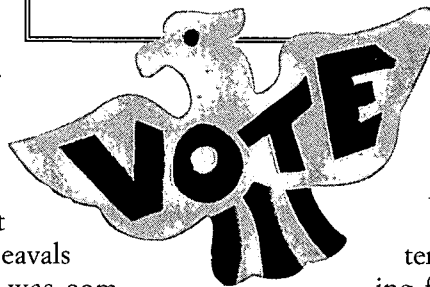
driver's license cycle, most citizens will have an opportunity to get on the voting rolls. By extending mail-in registration to the 33 states where mail-in procedures did not exist before, Motor Voter facilitates opportunities for outreach by activist public officials such as the secretaries of state of Connecticut, Florida, Ohio, and New Mexico, plus advocacy

groups such as First Vote, which coordinates voter registration of high school senior classes in some 3,000 schools.

Motor Voter also facilitates the maintenance of accurate voter lists by providing for regular updating and purging of voter rolls and encouraging standardized computerization of voter files. The Human Service Employees Registration and Voter Education Fund (Human SERVE), the activist organization led by Richard Cloward and Francis Fox Piven that pushed hard for Motor Voter's passage and that now monitors its implementation, boasts that 11 million voters have registered since the law went into effect, based on a telephone survey of election officials the organization conducted earlier this year.

Yet while 11 million registrations is certainly a good thing, particularly for a year in which there was no general election, that number sounds more

On its own, Motor  
Voter will not  
produce a Democratic  
bonanza at the polls.



impressive than it really is. First, since all reported registrations are included in this report, and there is nothing to compare them with, it is not clear how many can actually be attributed to Motor Voter, even among the 5.6 million obtained at motor vehicle departments. This is because of the "substitution" effect: Many of the people who registered through Motor Voter would have registered to vote even if Motor Voter hadn't been around—they just would have done it in the traditional way.

Also, since 1992 the voting-age population has grown by 7.5 million persons to 196.5 million. As a result, just keeping pace with the 71 percent level of registration achieved in 1992 will require 5.3 million new registrations by close of registration this year.

And even as the voting-age population grows, attrition due to death, departure, and nonvoting removes more voters from the rolls—an additional deficit that new registrations must balance. Because 1994 was a nonpresidential election year, with characteristically low voter interest, 3.7 million voters disappeared from the rolls who were not replaced. To restore registration to the 71 percent level established in 1992, these 3.7 million voters must be replaced, in addition to the 5.3 million needed to keep up with the population increase. That's 9 million new voters total.

Most important, a major proportion of registration "transactions" are really address changes for people who were already on the rolls somewhere else. In California over the past year, for example, more than half of all registration transactions were re-registrations. The combined effect of attrition and address changes was shown in a 1988 California study conducted by the Organizing Institute of San Francisco, which compared the year's registration transactions with net increases in registration rolls. The study concluded that it took more than two registration transactions to net a single addition to the rolls.

It is impossible to know with certainty until November, of course, but comparisons of Motor Voter registration transactions with state reports of

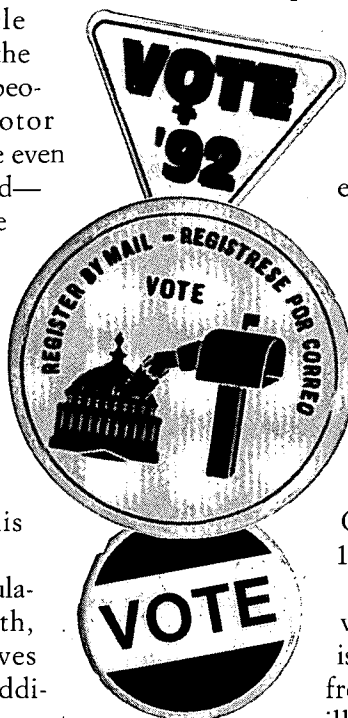
changes in cumulative registration reveal what can be expected. Florida, a state with a history of restrictive registration that has recently made an aggressive outreach effort under Motor Voter, reported the most transactions of any state

between October 1994 and May 1996: 2.15 million. The net addition to the rolls, however, was less: 1.01 million, or about one out of two.

California, a state with a history of liberal registration procedures that only began implementing Motor Voter in June 1995, reported 884,000 transactions by the March primary. The net result was a decrease in registration by 200,000 voters. Coupled with a voting-age population increase of 400,000 during the same period, the proportion of voters registered actually declined from 77.7 percent in October 1994 to 75.1 percent in March 1996.

Thus, registering the 9 million new voters required to maintain the 1992 registration rate of 71 percent, if information from Florida and California is indicative, will require some 18 million registration transactions. To increase registration nationally by just 1 percentage point would require 23 million registration transactions. Motor Voter certainly helps make this goal more attainable. But it's just as certainly not the entire solution.

**T**hese examples should help clarify why it is so difficult to substantially increase turnout by relying primarily on reforms that make registration easier. If voter interest in 1996 is the same as it was in 1992—and 78 percent of registered voters actually vote—the 23 million transactions required to increase registration from 71 percent of the electorate to 72 percent would yield an increase in turnout of just 1 percentage point, boosting turnout from 55.2 percent of the voting-age population to 56.2 percent. Improving turnout by 5 percentage points from 55.2 percent to 60.2 percent, a figure at the low end of political scientist Raymond Wolfinger's estimate of the impact of Motor Voter on turnout, would require adding 21.5 million voters to the rolls—or 43 million transactions—4 times what was reported in the first year of implementation.



These projections are based not only on the unlikely assumption that voters will be as motivated in 1996 as they were in 1992, but also on the premise that voters registered under Motor Voter are as likely to vote as those who registered under the old system. In the past, those registered by aggressive outreach programs such as Motor Voter have proved less likely to turn out on election day than those who "self-registered" by traditional means.

For sure, Motor Voter will yield increases in turnout in states such as Florida where "in person" registration requirements were a significant deterrent to voting. Yet while a broader and more representative slice of the electorate will surely get on the voter rolls, particularly to the extent registration in public assistance offices is effective, a significant national impact will depend on the extent to which political strategists take advantage of the new opportunities Motor Voter affords to motivate registrants by mobilizing them to turn out to vote.

**A**nd what about the partisan effects of Motor Voter? Because Motor Voter addresses the cost end of the equation, and not motivation, its immediate impact will be on those nonvoters for whom cumbersome registration procedures—and not a lack of interest in politics—has been the primary obstacle to voting. According to a 1996 study by Wolfinger and Benjamin Highton, those most likely to become voters as a result of the new law are drawn from two groups: the young and the movers. Neither group has a significantly more Democratic orientation than the electorate as a whole.

"Movers," the 43 percent of nonvoters who have lived less than two years at their current address, are less Democratic and less partisan than average voters: They are 7 percent less Democratic, 4 percent less Republican, and 12 percent more independent. ("Independent" refers to all people who do not select "Democrat" or "Republican" when they register.) Similarly, the 34 percent of nonvoters who are less than 30 years old are 9 percent less Democratic, 2 percent less Republican, but 11 per-

cent more independent. In fact, these younger citizens are less Democratic than any other age group: 28 percent of them voted for Ross Perot in 1992.

To the extent Motor Voter places more of these citizens on voter lists, its immediate impact will be to increase the proportion of independents, largely at the expense of Democrats. For example, after 1.06 million Floridians registered via Motor Voter, the state's Republican registration declined from 41.8

percent to 41.5 percent, but the Democratic registration declined from 49.4 percent to 46.6 percent. Registration of independents, meanwhile, increased from 8.6 percent to 10.6 percent.

Motor Voter will thus facilitate voting by young mobile middle-income couples for whom the need to register with a county clerk and learn the location of the local polling place has been a deterrent to voting. It will also facilitate voting by younger citizens eager to renew their driver's license, but unlikely to make an extra effort to register to vote. It will contribute little to the motivation of the young single mother on welfare who believes voting will not make a difference in her life or that of her children.

In addition, because the impact of the new law will be greatest in those states with the most restrictive registration requirements in the past, Motor Voter will enroll the most new voters in states and districts in which Democrats have had a hard time holding on to an electoral base. The 15 states with the most restrictive laws prior to 1993—Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Missouri, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas, Virginia, and Wyoming—split in terms of support for the Democratic nominee in 1992 and all but Massachusetts voted for Bush in 1988. On the other hand, nine of the ten states with the most liberalized voting laws already on the books—Colorado, the District of Columbia, Hawaii, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, and Washington—supported Clinton in 1992, although only half supported Dukakis in 1988.

The effect of Motor Voter will thus be to

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doesn't affect their lives.

increase turnout among reasonably motivated citizens living in states with histories of restrictive voting procedures, such as “movers” in Florida. It will have the least effect on the turnout of unmotivated citizens living in states with histories of liberalized voting procedures, such as low-income voters in Colorado. On its own, it will not change partisan alignments except in states where it makes outcomes more volatile by favoring independents at the expense of Democrats.

## MOBILIZING, NOT JUST MOTORIZING

Despite its limited direct effect on registration and turnout, Motor Voter offers partisan strategists important new opportunities for mobilizing voter turnout. By making registration easier, Motor Voter creates voter rolls that are more inclusive of everyone—lower-income citizens and citizens of color as well as young people and movers. Because of new updating and reporting requirements these lists will be more accurate and more likely to be computerized. They are also more likely to be available well before the election, something that is not the case with election day registration. This means parties, campaigns, and interest groups can more easily contact a broader and more inclusive slice of the electorate. This is not in itself a windfall for anyone, but it does offer Democrats a unique opportunity for a voter mobilization strategy if they choose to take it.

Here’s why: Recall that young people as a whole are not a particularly Democratic constituency. However, if you take that group of young people and divide them into voters and nonvoters, you’ll find that the voters in this group are significantly more Democratic. (Fifty-one percent of voters identify themselves as Democratic, compared to 42 percent of nonvoters; 37 percent of voters call themselves Republican, as opposed to 38 percent of nonvoters; and 12 percent identify as independent, versus 20 percent of nonvoters.) The same holds true for the other groups of nonvoters, as shown in the chart, “What a Difference Mobilization Makes,” on the next page.

Why the disparity? Do these people simply become more partisan and Democratic because

they vote? More likely, they are motivated to vote because they have become more partisan and Democratic—and that’s the lesson here. Mobilization efforts pay off, perhaps because these groups have some underlying Democratic orientation that can only be realized *if they are engaged*. This could make an important difference in those states and districts where Motor Voter will have the biggest impact and Democrats face some of their biggest challenges, particularly given the staggering number of nonvoters out there.

**B**ut what does “engage” really mean? As a growing body of research shows—and as activists have argued for many years—the key to motivating citizens to vote is personal partisan mobilization. [See, for instance, Peter Wielhouwer and Brad Lockerbie, “Party

Contacting and Political Participation, 1952-90,” *American Journal of Political Science*, February 1994.] For example, political scientist Eric Oliver has shown that the effect of absentee ballot reform on turnout depends on the extent to which it is coupled with partisan mobilization. In their 1993 book

*Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy in America*, Steven Rosenstone and Mark Hansen demonstrated that a major portion of the declining voter turnout over the last

30 years was due to decline in partisan contact with voters. The challenge for Democrats, then, is in contacting, engaging, and motivating these citizens to vote—a task made considerably easier by Motor Voter. Of course, conservatives—in the service of the GOP, the Christian Coalition, Ross Perot’s Reform Party, or some other group—can reach out to these groups more easily too.

People are most motivated to act when contacted by people whom they know rather than by pieces of direct mail, telemarketers, and television commercials. Ironically, the same electoral technology that has facilitated marginalization of much of the electorate could facilitate its incorporation if combined with effective strategies for personal mobilization. Computerization of voter files makes it possible to specifically target on a precinct-by-

**P**ersonal contact and a compelling message is what motivates people to vote.





## WHAT A DIFFERENCE MOBILIZATION MAKES

For each of the demographic groups below, the portion that votes is more likely to identify itself as Democratic than the portion that doesn't vote. That means progressives could reap some benefit from Motor Voter if—and only if—they mobilize these constituencies by making personal contact with a compelling message.

	% Democratic	% Republican	% independent
Movers* who don't vote	44	35	21
Movers who vote	52	39	9

*(Total number of nonvoting movers: 39 million)*

Young people** who don't vote	42	38	20
Young people who vote	51	37	12

*(Total number of nonvoting young people: 32 million)*

Low-income people*** who don't vote	52	31	19
Low-income people who vote	62	29	10

*(Total number of nonvoting low-income people: 64 million)*

Racial minorities who don't vote	59	24	17
Racial minorities who vote	73	17	10

*(Total number of nonvoting racial minorities: 29 million.)*

\* People who have lived at their current address for less than two years

\*\* 18- to-29-year-olds

\*\*\* People in households that make less than \$30,000

Sources: Turnout and partisanship data from the National Election Study, as reported by Benjamin Highton and Raymond Wolfinger. ("Anticipating the Effects of the National Voter Registration Act of 1993," revised version of a paper delivered at the 1995 annual meeting of the American Political Science Association.) Voting-age population estimates by the Committee for the Study of the American Electorate.

precinct basis only those new registrants who fit the demographic profiles described above.

In other words, what is required is to contact these citizens and persuade them that turning out to vote could make a big difference to them. Although this is easier said than done, Motor Voter helps because in most states newly registered voters will at least receive mailings from the state: a voter card, sample ballot, and an election pamphlet. This provides them with basic information and lets them know that their participation matters enough to

merit a piece of mail from the state. Also, to the extent Motor Voter generates more accurate lists, it makes that information more widely accessible and reduces the cost of targeted voter contact.

Targeting these voters, however, requires a reversal of the approach political strategists favor of allocating limited campaign resources to persuading voters who are most likely to vote but uncertain for whom. It would require a commitment to mobilizing voters who are less certain to vote, but more likely to support the party's candidate if they do.

Although Democrats should prioritize newly registered voters in their party, they would also realize a good return by contacting independents in these demographic groups. Voters under 30 offer a particularly good opportunity because the party with which a person votes for the first time is extremely important in establishing their subsequent voting pattern. Whoever reaches them most directly and with the most compelling message could win their support for decades to come.

Although at the very least party organizations could target these voters for a piece of welcoming "motivational" mail, a more effective proposal would be to eschew contacting these voters through expensive telemarketing or direct mail techniques in favor of investing in the recruitment, training, and deployment of partisan volunteers from the same communities in which the voters live. On a precinct-

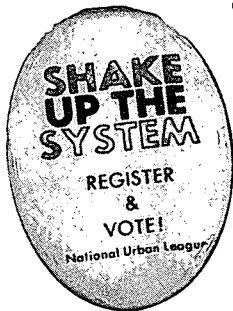
by-precinct basis, these potential voters could be personally contacted in manageable numbers, asked to support the party, and followed up on to make certain they go to the polls.

It would be an excellent task to assign to partisan volunteers who live in the same precinct—or to union activists mobilized by the new AFL-CIO political program, graduates of the Democratic National

Committee's training institutes, or grassroots networks such as Citizen Action.

Of course, technique is not enough. Volunteers would need a very persuasive story as to why citizens under 30, those with incomes below \$30,000, and citizens of color should vote for Democratic candidates. When visiting newly registered Democrats, it would be important to reaffirm their partisan commitment. When visiting independents, it would be important to offer them good reasons not only to vote for a specific candidate or issue, but to vote Democratic. If convinced, they will be more likely to vote and to keep voting.

And so for all of its revolutionary promise, the real impact of Motor Voter will depend on the extent to which political strategists persuade citizens—person by person—that voting for their candidates can make a real difference in the citizens' lives. Procedural reform without political change will yield little in the way of real results. The real answer to the question of whom Motor Voter will help is that it depends on who does what it takes to earn it. □



# MOTOR VOTER'S BREAKDOWN LANE

BY ROBYN GEAREY

**I**t took a highly publicized grassroots campaign and the election of a Democratic president to turn the Motor Voter bill into the National Voter Registration Act of 1993. But that, it turns out, was only half the battle. Several governors (most of them Republicans) have resisted implementation, often despite support for Motor Voter by the legislatures and secretaries of state.

Three groups instrumental in Motor Voter's passage—the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN), the Human Service Employees Registration and Voter Education Fund (Human SERVE), and Project Vote—have monitored the law's implementation with telephone surveys and on-the-spot investigations of state agencies. Here is what they reported:



**Litigation Pileup.** Three states tried to side-swipe Motor Voter by challenging it in court. California Governor Pete Wilson filed suit against the United States in December of 1994, on the grounds that the law violated the Tenth Amendment, which grants states all rights not explicitly given to the federal government. Wilson lost the case but pursued it through several rounds of appeals, until the U.S. Supreme Court finally refused to hear it. Every court found Motor Voter to be constitutional under Article I, Section 4 of the Constitution, which gives Congress the right to regulate federal election procedures. The Ninth Circuit Court required Wilson to implement Motor Voter by June 19, 1995.

South Carolina and Virginia also filed Tenth Amendment suits, with similar results. The suit by Virginia Governor George Allen was the most extensive of any. It claimed Motor Voter violated three separate clauses of the Constitution in addition to the Tenth Amendment. Yet a Circuit Court judge saw things differently, ordering Virginia to implement the law by March 6 of this year. Allen did not appeal the decision.

**Administrative Gridlock.** After Michigan's state legislature passed enabling legislation, Governor John Engler used his line-item veto to eliminate funding, calling Motor Voter an unfunded mandate. As a result, the secretary of state's office ran out of mail-in forms within days of making them available. The office had planned to order 2 million; money only allowed for 100,000.

Meanwhile, ACORN and Human SERVE have accused Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York, New Hampshire, Ohio, Rhode Island, and Pennsylvania of failing to train agency workers in registration procedures or to notify would-be registrants of their options. This was particularly true of public assistance agencies—where, of course, most of the clients would be more likely to support Democrats. In Connecticut, less than

3 percent of applicants for public assistance have registered to vote; none of the other six states have done any better than 7 percent.

Officials in Ohio and Pennsylvania dispute the diagnosis. Responding to ACORN's study, Ohio's secretary of state, Robert Taft, noted that in his state a decline in the number of people receiving public assistance and the existence of mail-in registration prior to Motor Voter make it difficult to judge the law's effect. Elsewhere, though, the reports have shamed officials into action. After Human SERVE's report

made headlines in the *Boston Globe* in July, Massachusetts

announced that it will soon include voter registration information on all public assistance applications. As for Rhode Island, a spokesperson for the secretary of state says, "We're concerned about it and we're looking into the problem."



**Ballot Congestion.** Give Illinois, Kansas, and Mississippi credit for the most creative subterfuge: In each of these states, Motor Voter procedures are available to all citizens—but only for *federal* elections. For state and local elections, separate registration is required through more traditional means.

Of course this dual-registration system requires each county or city to maintain two different voter registration rolls. It also means that two separate ballots have to be provided on election day. Talk about government waste.

This spring the Kansas legislature passed a law to unify election procedures; in Illinois, the city of Chicago, among others, has filed a suit against the state's dual-registration system.

There is no official campaign underway to eliminate dual registration in Mississippi, despite strong support for Motor Voter from the secretary of state. □

*The full text of the ACORN report is available online at <<<http://epn.org/library/pumovo.html>>>, as part of the Electronic Policy Network.*

# IS GOD A REPUBLICAN?

## WHY POLITICS IS DANGEROUS FOR RELIGION

BY ISAAC KRAMNICK AND R. LAURENCE MOORE



The 1996 campaign has been sobering for Americans who believe that Jefferson's declaration of a "wall of separation" between church and state forms a fundamental point of national agreement. It is hard to recall a presidential contest when religious voices and a religious coalition have intruded in such partisan ways. A poll recently conducted by the Pew Research Center points to a striking change in the attitudes of Americans, especially evangelical Christians, toward mixing religion and politics. Evangelicals were once committed to the view that Christian churches exist primarily to carry out God's work of saving souls; now about 70 percent of evangelicals, both black and white, agree that "churches should express views on social and political matters." This does not necessarily imply an abandonment of belief in church-state separation, but it is a shift that commands our attention.

Consider how far we have come from the moment in Houston during the 1960 primary campaign when John F. Kennedy confronted a group of Protestant ministers, mainly Southern Baptists, who vented their ancient suspicion that Catholics could not as a matter of faith accept the American separation of church and state. One unappreciated irony in the exchange was that throughout American history Catholics and Baptists had been the strongest opponents of efforts by other Christians to mix religious and political agendas. Baptists and Catholics both regarded themselves as the victims of state-sponsored moral legislation. Although Kennedy's answer to the

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southern Protestant ministers on that occasion probably did not win him their votes, it reflected a position that they shared with him. As a religious person, Kennedy said, I am influenced in my moral attitudes by my religion, and this will affect my behavior as president. But I will in no way seek to use the powers of the state to force my religious and moral convictions upon people who do not share them.

Against that memory, we may set the more recent image of Pat Buchanan, another Catholic who wants to become president, courting support in Southern Baptist churches for a moral and cultural crusade to take back America for right-thinking Christians. Other candidates this year have also paraded their religious convictions like military medals—a strategy that may have reached rock bottom when Phil Gramm's flagging campaign implied that a sound view about Christ's Second Coming was relevant in judging aspirants to the presidency. So much for the spirit of Article 6 of the Constitution, the clause proclaiming that "no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States."

The idea that right-thinking Christians should take back America has been a rallying cry for Ralph Reed's Christian Coalition, now the strongest special-interest group in the Republican Party. Without doubt, the coalition has helped transform many Protestant evangelicals into GOP zealots. But the connection carries considerable risk. Reed has tied his religious troops to the fortunes of Republican candidates in November. If they win, the Christian Coalition will remain in the news—at least until the next election. If they lose, and especially if they lose because of perceived close links to what many voters view as strident moral crusading that quotes the Bible on behalf of slashing welfare and defeating bans on assault weapons, Reed will pass into history. In either case, religion is diminished because Reed's gamble makes the cultural force of religion depend upon the number of votes it can command. And that result is precisely what *religious* champions of separation of church and state have most feared.

## RELIGION IN A SECULAR STATE

Religion and politics have always mixed in this country's history. The line between legitimate and

illegitimate mixture is not always easy to draw, but the Constitution provides some guidance. That document, we have argued in our recent book *The Godless Constitution*, is intentionally godless, as many of its opponents charged in the state ratifying conventions of 1787 and 1788. Not only did Article 6, in a revolutionary step, abolish any religious test for public office; the preamble to the Constitution also failed to mention God. The United States Constitution was a creation of "we the people." Unlike the earlier Articles of Confederation or the state constitutions, it did not suggest any divine ordinance or divine mission.

The connection between religion and politics is dangerous for both.

The new secular constitutional order alarmed many people, and they predicted the destruction of religion and the state. The ban on religious establishment in the First Amendment increased their gloom. Nonetheless, organized religion prospered in the American

republic beyond anyone's wildest dreams. As a result, most Americans began to regard the constitutional placement of religion in the private sector, beyond the control of politicians, as a great blessing. During the nineteenth century, all of the states—which were free to deal with religion as they chose—fell in line with the basic principles of secularity in the federal Constitution. The states did so not because of the Supreme Court, but because Americans generally recognized the benefits to religion of a secular state.

That's the easy part. There remained much to quarrel about. The Constitution did not settle everything regarding law or common practice. There have been many efforts to write God or Christ into the Constitution, most dramatically during the Civil War when it was argued that the bloodshed was God's punishment for being left out of the founding document. While these efforts to add a Christian amendment have consistently failed, the full force of the Constitution's secular base has been modified in various and familiar ways.

Since George Washington, American presidents have sworn their oath of office upon a Bible and added to their oath of office the phrase "so help me God." In their inaugural addresses, they have

made perfunctory or extended references to divine protection. Even Jefferson and Madison, the most hard-line watchdogs of church-state separation of all American presidents, did so. Jefferson even authorized the use of government money to fund the educational activities of missionaries among Native-American tribes. Prayer begins sessions of the American Congress and Supreme Court. The U.S. Treasury prints "In God We Trust" on coins and dollar bills. And Congress in 1954 placed the "nation under God" in an amended version of the Pledge of Allegiance, still recited daily by most American school children despite the injunction against state-sponsored school prayer.

Most Americans have learned to view these violations of secularity as consistent with the intentions of the founders, and they have at least this much reason on their side: All of the founders viewed a religious people as essential to the success of their democratic republic. Democracy depended upon a moral citizenry, and most people's morals, in the view of the founders, rested on a theistic religion. Although the drafters of the godless Constitution believed that religion would prosper only if government stayed out of religious matters and did nothing to confuse the work of politicians with the work of religious leaders, they also did not want government ever to seem antagonistic to religion or unsympathetic to the important work that religion accomplished in furthering the nation's success.

Thus Jefferson as a politician and candidate for president in 1800 never talked about his religious views. In a private letter he answered his clerical enemies who falsely accused him of atheism with his famous phrase, "I have sworn upon the altar of God eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man." Newt Gingrich regularly cites this line to argue that Jefferson wanted more

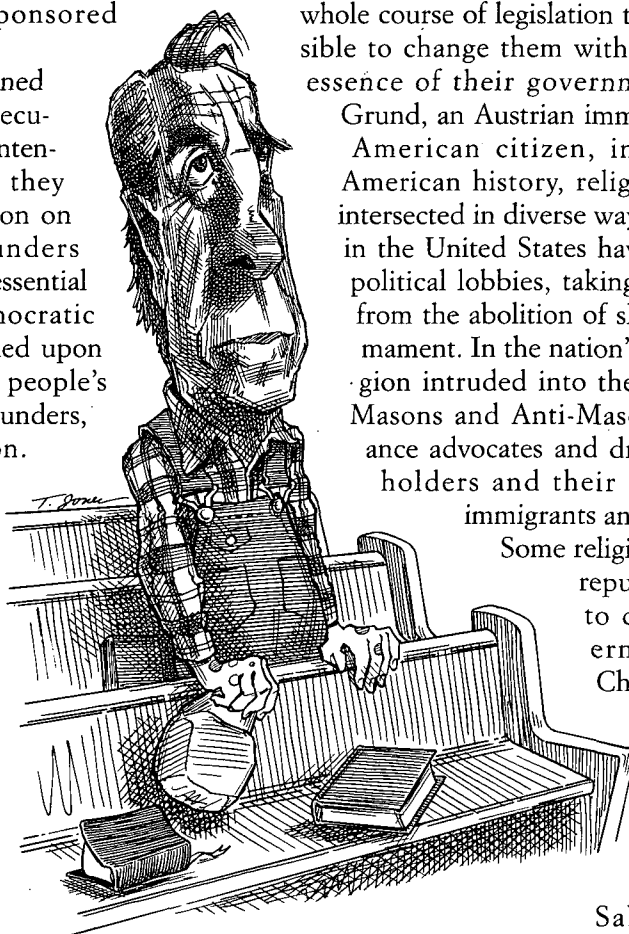
religious discussion in politics, but the great Virginian's intention was exactly the opposite. Even so, when Jefferson assumed the office of the presidency, he took comfort from his view—and he said so—that Americans were a religious people.

## INTO THE BREACH

So the United States began somewhat paradoxically with a godless Constitution and routine references to religion in much national political oratory. "The religious habits of Americans form not only the basis of their private and public morals but have become so thoroughly interwoven with their whole course of legislation that it would be impossible to change them without affecting the very essence of their government," wrote Francis Grund, an Austrian immigrant who became an American citizen, in 1837. Throughout American history, religion and politics have intersected in diverse ways. Organized churches in the United States have acted in the past as political lobbies, taking stands on everything from the abolition of slavery to nuclear disarmament. In the nation's first half century, religion intruded into the controversy between Masons and Anti-Masons, between temperance advocates and drinkers, between slaveholders and their opponents, between immigrants and Know-Nothings.

Some religious groups in the early republic were not hesitant to demand explicit government respect for Christianity, as, for example, in the divisive debate over whether post offices should remain open on Sunday. So-called

Sabbatarians led the charge against Sunday mail from 1810 until 1840 and were successfully beaten back by other religious leaders who insisted correctly that it was not the responsibility of churches to dictate how government ran its affairs. In this era Baptists led the anti-Sabbatarian cause and refined all the arguments they had long held about the necessity of keeping religion and politics distinct. Recalling Roger Williams, that devout Puritan who was kicked out of the Massachusetts Bay Colony for



believing that governments could be as well managed by non-Christians as by Christians, Richard Johnson of Kentucky, the chair of the Senate committee on the Post Office and Post Roads and a strong Baptist, successfully argued that closing the post offices on Sunday was a measure "incompatible with a republican legislature, which is purely for political and not religious purposes. . . . Legislators have no power to define God or point out to the citizen one religious duty." Eventually, of course, post offices were closed, but not before the telegraph had made Sunday mail less necessary and not before secular arguments were added to the religious objection.

We do not cite the past connections between religion and politics, and the disagreements they have caused, to give comfort to Ralph Reed and his Christian Coalition. Rather, we want to specify where they, like other groups in the past, have stepped over a line that should not be crossed. Reed, who holds a doctorate in American history, argues that the only thing new and different in this election season is that conservatives more than liberals are making use of religious politics. In his mind he is only following the example of William Lloyd Garrison, William Jennings Bryan, and Martin Luther King, Jr., who turned the "sins" of American society into deeply divisive political controversies. If Jesse Jackson can preach and campaign in churches, black and white, why can't Ronald Reagan, George Bush, and Bob Dole court the support of fundamentalists?

They can and they do. But it is important to distinguish between the moral witness of religious people who speak out strongly about an issue that offends their moral conscience, and the use of religion as a strategic means to advance the fortunes of a particular party or candidate. Political religion can sometimes be divisive, as it was in the civil rights struggle. What becomes worrisome is when that division follows party lines and no longer seems to have much to do with moral witness. Whatever the truth of the idea that God blesses Americans, God surely does not bless Americans as Republicans or Democrats.

Strictly speaking, there are very few unconstitutional uses of religion in politics (although there are

violations of federal election laws). The disestablishment of religion gives ministers private professional status with as much right to run for office as doctors and lawyers, and the constitutional guarantee of free speech renders religious argument as legitimate as nonreligious argument in advancing a political goal. Some political uses of religion, however, plainly undermine the protection the founders sought to construct for both sound politics and religious authority.

Alexis de Tocqueville held as astute a view as anyone of what American religion can contribute to public life and what harm is done when it tries to do something else. There was "no country in the world," he famously maintained, "where the Christian religion retains a greater influence over the souls of men than in America."

That influence he saw as a virtue as long as it was indirect. In a critical passage in *Democracy in America*, he insisted that while religion must encourage virtue, it must never allow the claims of virtue to become infected with partisan politics. "If the Americans, who change the head of the government once in four years, who elect new legislators every two years, and renew the state officers every twelve months . . .

had not placed religion beyond their reach, where could it take firm hold in the ebb and flow of human opinions?"

Tocqueville's warning echoed the precise reason that had motivated the founders to separate church and state in the first place. If religion were to become despised by one group of people because it let itself be closely allied to their entrenched political opponents, the moral capital that religion represented in American society would be squandered. Whenever politically ambitious men tried to transfer God's work from churches and church groups to their self-interested political conventions, they injured the reputation of religion.

**A** lot of religious Americans know this better than our politicians do. In June the American Catholic bishops, who represent what has been since the 1850s America's largest Christian denomination, issued a statement seeking to preserve for themselves a political voice on important moral issues, such as abortion, with-

God surely  
does not bless  
Americans as  
Democrats or  
Republicans.



out involving themselves in moves "to advance or to undermine the electoral fortunes of any individual or party." The Catholic bishops have been in an especially fortunate position to stay above party politics since the economic positions they have taken generally give comfort to liberals, whereas their social positions appeal more readily to conservatives. Whatever their positions, however, the bishops have been content to state principles, and to advance moral and religious reasons for their political positions, but otherwise to avoid party endorsements or to issue statements suggesting that God has a stake in the outcome of American elections. Like Tocqueville, a Catholic himself, they stated that "when religious leaders enter into electoral politics, it is more likely that religion will be debased than that politics will be elevated."

The bishops' position does not seek to silence religion. It does not declare religion irrelevant to political debate. Far from it. Rather, it tries to mobilize moral conscience based on the importance and visibility of religion in American public life. It bears witness to moral positions in a way that does not compromise that witness to short-term political gains. Nor does it declare war on other people's moral positions. To be sure, on the abortion issue many Catholic leaders are prepared, if they can prevail in the legislatures, to coerce people who do not agree with their moral stance. That, however, is not per se illegitimate as long as civil rights are protected and their moral arguments carry no privileged political authority. What is always unacceptable is for religious certainty to trump politics and for government policy to privilege or codify religious belief in ways that preempt a pluralist democratic process. In politics, a religious lobbyist stands on the same footing as a lobbyist for General Motors. What they advocate may be good for the country, but that benefit has to be demonstrated.

The pragmatic issue, from the standpoint of the churches and religious leaders, is the cost of their political involvement to the prestige and moral authority of religion. When religious leaders act in ways that render them indistinguishable from the Doles and the Clintons, they jeopardize the respect

that they otherwise enjoy. This is what the Christian Coalition and its leaders are risking.

## CLEAN AND MEAN

Installed as head of the Christian Coalition by Pat Robertson, who created it from the ruins of Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority, Ralph Reed found himself in charge of a well-financed organization that had a deserved reputation for extreme statements. People involved with the organization were continually saying that America was a Christian nation and the task of politics was to restore God to the center of American life. Pat Robertson was on record stating that separation of church and state was a lie of the left. Reed knew his American history well enough to recognize that such statements were not only wildly at odds with the Constitution but also an impediment to gaining

national power. Stealth victories in local school board elections might be useful for organizing a grassroots movement. But a seat at the table in Washington, which conservatives covet as much as liberals, was a far better thing.

Reed's mission from the beginning was to clean up the coalition's act. And so he

When religious leaders act like politicians, they jeopardize the respect that they otherwise enjoy.

has, even if it has meant making some of the other leaders associated with conservative religious causes, especially Jerry Falwell, look inept. Reed has proclaimed his respect for separation of church and state. He has muted claims in the coalition's publications about Christian nationhood and has invited Jews and Catholics into an organization whose base was, and remains, overwhelmingly Protestant and white. He has pulled the coalition away from the language of cultural warfare that sank Pat Buchanan as a national leader and has shown a willingness to put off moral issues that threaten to draw away too many votes from conservative Republican candidates. He has denied that the faith claims of the Christian Coalition override the faith claims of other people.

In steering this corrective course, however, Reed has stuck by the man who butters his bread, Pat Robertson. Robertson's many blundering statements, according to Reed, never mean what they seem to mean. And in the end, Reed's efforts to



arrange what he calls a "marriage of a sense of social justice with the practical world of modern politics" transform religious witness into a politics where nothing must get in the way of winning. Reed is not a spiritual leader, but, in his own phrase, a "political junkie." What he doesn't admit but makes abundantly evident in his prose is that, like Robertson, he loves the smell of power. He claims that the Christian Coalition is a nonpartisan organization, but that is patent nonsense. We can think of no religious organization in American history that has so manifestly tied itself to one political party, indeed, to a particular wing within it.

Reed's recent book, *Active Faith*, is only sporadically about religion. In fact, it is hard sometimes to figure out whether his faith has anything to do with his politics ("My religious beliefs never changed my views on the issues to any great degree") or whether it acts just as a sort of energizing bunny. In a disarmingly candid but unmistakably arrogant way, *Active Faith* is about one man's quest for influence, his thrill of traveling in police-escorted limousines that screech to stops and burn rubber on their way to rallies where audiences stomp their feet, wave banners, and blow horns when he appears. Reed has won that influence for the moment. The media assiduously court him, and candidates line up to seek his advice and intervention.

**B**ut there is a price. Reed's influence depends on the outcome of elections and whether his movement appears to offer candidates more support than it costs. Our own guess is that Reed's influence will wane sooner rather than later because for all his cautious bargaining among leaders of the Republican Party he has yet to get his troops under control. Reed may have tailored a moderate image for himself, but his followers too enthusiastically subscribe to Reed's view that people of faith have fled the Democratic

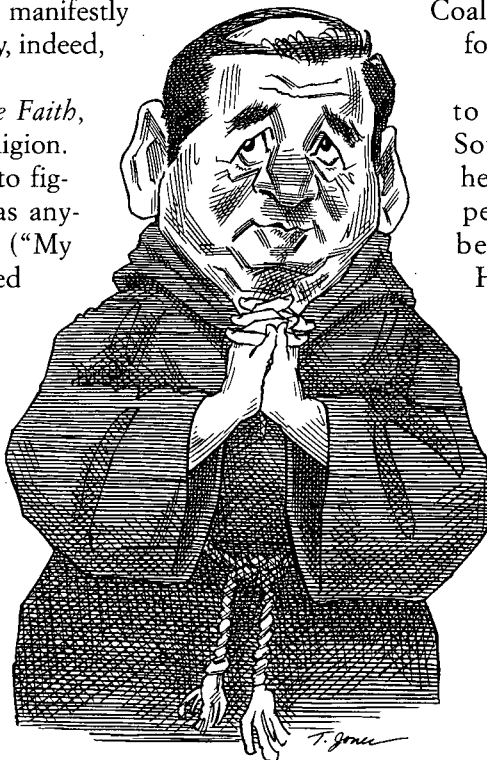
Party; these followers often speak of their opponents as evil men and women whose moral positions reek of hellfire. Christian Coalition conventions have nothing in common with the Social Gospel crusades that Reed wants to emulate. The delegates are too angry. Their televised images and their frankly smutty literature suggest neither piety nor political tolerance. That is among the reasons why many conservative Christians who vote

Republican want no part of them. Media attention notwithstanding, the Christian Coalition has not spoken in this year for all of evangelical America.

There is still reason to regret and to worry about the retreat of Southern Baptists from their long-held belief that making or keeping people Christian is not a business best entrusted to politicians.

Historically among the strictest Protestants, Baptists ought to recognize that a group of Christians who begin meetings with a cult-like version of the Pledge of Allegiance—"I pledge allegiance to the Christian flag and to the Savior for whose kingdom it stands, one Savior, crucified, risen and coming again, with life and liberty for all who believe"—have not only tainted politics but have pushed religion over the line into idolatry.

Reed says that government cannot make people moral. Nonetheless, a pledge that it can seems to be on every candidate's lips. Under pressure from the Christian Coalition, Republicans have tried to make character the issue of presidential politics in 1996. The result has too often been the worst sort of religious politics, a politics of moral name-calling that implicates many religious people in scurrilous attacks upon Bill Clinton as a moral leper. The New England clergy who demonized Thomas Jefferson during the election campaign of 1800 followed a similar strategy. It proved to be a disastrous failure for the Federalist Party, and it all but destroyed the Congregational Church. History doesn't always repeat itself. But the thought that it might ought to give Reed some sleepless nights. □



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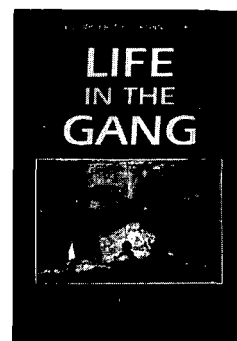
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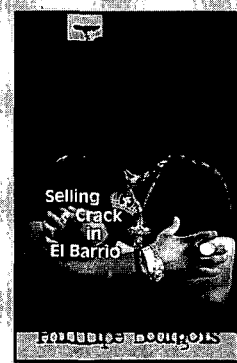
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# FIGHTING THE ESTABLISHMENT (CLAUSE)

BY JENNIFER BRADLEY

**Y**ou may not have heard of the Rutherford Institute, but you've probably heard of some of its clients. There was the St. Louis boy who was forbidden to pray in the school cafeteria. There was the Virginia girl with physical and mental disabilities who was forced to stop reading her Bible on the school bus. And there was the public school teacher in Waco, Texas, who was fired after praying with a student during class.

A legal and educational organization based in Charlottesville, Virginia, the Rutherford Institute has emerged as one of the most active of the newly prominent religious right groups working, they say, to ensure that religious people get a fair deal, particularly in public schools. Rutherford has done some laudable work, challenging some ridiculous, discriminatory, and unconstitutional rules, and winning some important legal decisions on behalf of free expression. But Rutherford uses the tools and words of liberalism to advance a pinched, illiberal worldview. In its educational and fundraising efforts, it fosters a paranoid belief that Christians in America are under siege from evil forces that control the government and oppose faith and family. At its core, it is an organization that promotes suspicion and insularity, not trust and tolerance.

In fact, it's a pretty good time for Rutherford and its causes; the political and cultural influence of religious groups has plainly revived. But Rutherford and similar groups choose to ignore their own strength. They refuse to take yes for an answer, even though it is the answer that courts and other public institutions often give them. They

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continue to describe themselves as victims. Why? Because the answer they get is really "Yes, but . . ." They can have voluntary silent prayer in public schools, for example, but not the Ten Commandments. Still, this isn't an assault on religious people. It is instead an expression of the limited power any single religion can command in a liberal society. Like all true believers, the advocates of conservative religious causes can experience the satisfactions of concrete limited accomplishments, or they can embrace the more immediate gratifications of emotionalism and extremism and give no quarter to liberals, secularists, homosexuals, and others who have a different way of joining faith to citizenship. In a pluralistic and secular society like ours, the best, if not the easiest, choices are the former. Rutherford chooses the latter.

The Rutherford Institute was founded in 1982, nine years before Pat Robertson's American Center for Law and Justice. So far Rutherford hasn't attracted the media attention that Robertson's center has. John Whitehead, its founder and president, doesn't have a million-dollar ministry like Robertson's or a vivid public persona like Phyllis Schlafly's. But in 14 years Rutherford has grown out of the basement of a suburban Virginia home and into six regional and three international offices. It now has more than 200 cases before the courts.

Whitehead makes the implausible claim that a fiercely secular and aggressive state is forcing Christians into a defensive, even besieged, position.

Whitehead declares on an audiocassette that the "arbitrary division between church and state" is "a rallying point to subdue the opinion of that vast body of citizens who represent those with religious convictions." Whitehead writes in his recent book, *Religious Apartheid*, "As Christianity is driven further away, American public life is increasingly vulnerable to radical lifestyles and opinions of a purely secular consensus. . . . Those supporting the system of religious apartheid in America will intensify the pressure, and oppression and even overt persecution of those holding a religious worldview may result." The traditional family, too, is under threat from agents of

the state, who use the public schools to "insidiously undermine the innocence of children and try to reshape their hearts and minds." While about a third of Rutherford's budget is spent on legal work, the rest goes to educational and fundraising programs that produce these audiocassettes, videotapes, books, magazines, and pamphlets through which the Rutherford Institute promotes its defensive Christian worldview.

**I**n the courts, by contrast, Rutherford's attorneys look like reasonable, results-oriented advocates. They often rely on arguments that even staunchly secular liberals would love, or at least swallow, making strong connections between free exercise rights and free speech rights, and decrying censorship of unpopular—that is, religious—ideas. Douglas Laycock is a constitutional scholar at the University of Texas Law School who has worked both with and against Rutherford (with the institute when it defends the religious free speech rights of students; against it when it defends

school sponsorship of religious speech). He says of Rutherford: "They get a bad rap. . . . Lots of people assume that they don't give a damn about the establishment clause, and I've certainly heard them say things that give that impression. But if you look at their cases, the great bulk are straight free speech and free exercise." The Reverend John Andersen, a Baptist minister and member of Americans United for Separation of

**R**utherford has won important decisions on behalf of free expression. But it uses the tools of liberalism to advance a pinched, illiberal worldview.

Church and State, says, "With Rutherford, we do often agree on many issues, which is something that often people in the mainstream press don't understand. We are both concerned about the free exercise [of religion]."

In interviews, John Whitehead sounds like someone who wants only a level playing field for all kinds of beliefs. In a conversation in his big, sunny office filled with pop-culture kitsch, Whitehead speaks only a little about Christianity and quite a lot about free expression. He frames what Rutherford does in legal, procedural terms, not religious, substantive ones. Yes, he's willing to go to court to



keep a picture of Jesus in a Michigan public school. But that's because there were also pictures of such great historical and religious figures as Martin Luther King, Jr., in the same hallway. "A picture of Gandhi? Why not? A picture of an atheist? Why not? . . . Why not make schools a forum?" he asks.

Kelly Shakelford is the southwest regional director for the Rutherford Institute, based in Dallas. His philosophy echoes Whitehead's libertarian-sounding remarks: "We're not fighting to get prayer in school. We're fighting for rights. . . . We don't want the government involved in religion. We also don't want religion banned." But what Rutherford appears not to recognize is that one person's religious freedom can sometimes be another person's religious coercion.

**T**ake the case of one Rutherford client, the teacher in Waco who was scolded and eventually fired for establishing a moment of silence in her classroom, for reading a book about a biblical figure to her students, and for praying with a child to calm him down. On the first two points, the institute's lawyers are on solid ground: Many legal scholars believe a moment of silence is constitutionally acceptable, and teachers can use religious books for secular purposes. But, Shakelford admits, "the third one is a little more complicated."

In fact, it's not more complicated—it's just plain illegal. In just about any circumstance, teacher-led prayer in school clearly constitutes state sponsorship of religion. Last year, President Clinton issued a directive on religion in the public schools that borrowed "heavily and gratefully" from a statement issued by a dozen religious and civil liberties groups, from the American Jewish Congress to the National Association of Evangelicals to the American Civil Liberties Union. The document interprets the First Amendment's applicability to schools by saying, "Teachers and school administrators, when acting in those capacities, are representatives of the state, and . . . are themselves prohibited [by the establishment clause] from encouraging or soliciting student religious or anti-religious activity . . . [and] may not engage in religious activities with their students." Secularists and atheists are not the only ones outraged by the idea of a teacher inviting a student to pray at school. Reverend Andersen of Americans United declares, "What would be worth fighting and dying for is if

[school officials] tried to lead religious instruction for my child, or lead my child in prayer. A Methodist better not. . . . Even a Baptist who is not in my community of faith better not."

Both Whitehead and Shakelford disavow any desire to return to the pre-1963 schoolday, in which the principal intoned a prayer over the intercom every morning. They say they just want religious people to be able to express themselves freely in public, including in public schools. But this isn't always a matter of the free exchange of ideas in some ideal, neutral, rational forum. Parents worry, justifiably, that their children will learn and mimic someone else's ideas about the divine, which could undermine parental religious instruction as much as teaching by an unbeliever could. Rutherford is blind to the threat that one group of believers can present to the children of another group of believers. Rutherford can insist, as it does with success, that religion has a place in public schools. The Constitution allows that. The problem with Rutherford and other religious right organizations is that they want to go further. But beyond an insistence on equality between religious and irreligious points of view, they simply cannot go—not in state-supported institutions, anyway.

**G**raduation prayer is as difficult a legal issue as classroom prayer. The U.S. Fifth Circuit Court has declared that nonproselytizing, nonsectarian, student-initiated prayer is acceptable at graduations. Rutherford, while enthusiastically promoting the Fifth Circuit's decision, has sought in at least one case to distort it. The institute represented a number of students who, perhaps realizing that saying a generic prayer is like addressing a love letter to "occupant," wanted to pray in accordance with their faith, rather than in a generic way, at a Santa Fe, Texas, graduation ceremony. Flaccid as it is, however, nonsectarian prayer is the only kind of prayer appropriate for a government ceremony (it was a public school), since it is the only kind that does not confer the state's imprimatur on a particular faith. As Laycock says, "To say [prayer] is student initiated when it's an official school function is just a fiction. It is still school sponsored, students are delegated authority by the school. People who [don't] want the religious service [have] it imposed on them." But, Shakelford responds, "Do we want to encourage our kids to ask others to be censored or do we want to encourage

our kids and students to appreciate expression even though they disagree with it? It's an important part of learning how to live in a diverse society."

Wait a minute. Is this an argument for Christianization based upon diversity? If so, there is irony (or worse) in this right-wing organization's borrowing one of the left's favorite ideas to advance its own agenda. Does Rutherford really want the lively open forum that Shakelford and Whitehead claim to want? A look at their "public education program efforts" reveals a deep discomfort with America's multiplicity of beliefs. A note to potential donors from John Whitehead's wife Carol urges, "Unless we act, and I mean soon, homosexual marriages and homosexual 'families' will be placed on equal and possibly preferential footing with the traditional heterosexual marriage and the traditional family"; the letter details other "threats" to traditional families such as, weirdly, the increasing percentage of young, childless married couples. A "child protection education bulletin" includes an excerpt from a state-administered test deplorable for showing a "violent, depressing, hopeless, and pro-feminist view of life."

So it appears that diversity, for Rutherford, is a tactic, a way to get their standpoint heard—and then to disqualify the standpoints of others. Of course, fundraising solicitations are rarely a place for even-handed discussion, and religious people cannot be expected to bless what they find wholly immoral in the name of tolerance. But even so, Rutherford's "educational" material (such as its *Religious Apartheid* video, which shows blue-suited bureaucrats dismantling a family, and swastika-wearing soldiers brainwashing a hapless father) seems designed to enrage the faithful, rather than to help people with the challenge of living in, and even changing, a pluralist society that treats their essential commitments and deepest beliefs as just another opinion.

Moreover, what neither Rutherford's low-key legal mode nor its apocalyptic "educational" one acknowledges is how much consensus there is about the importance of religion, and the remarkable degree of freedom that Americans have to live

out their faith, in public schools as in other arenas. Students can gather around the flagpole to pray before school. They can have religious-club meetings in the school building if secular clubs have the same privilege. They can distribute tracts and evangelize willing classmates. Book reports on the Bible,

history papers depicting Jesus as the greatest person who ever lived, and religious drawings for art class are all acceptable provided the student chooses the subject. True, some ACLU-fearing administrators don't know all this, but that makes them ignorant, not (as Rutherford suggests) malicious.

Rutherford's picture of religious life in America is a distortion. It is hard to believe Rutherford's claim that religious people face growing persecution. If that were the case, then why does the institute continue

to trot out the same half dozen or so examples? Rob Boston, assistant director of communications for Americans United, points out that Rutherford is still showing up at congressional hearings with the same wheelchair-bound, mentally handicapped child whose Bible was confiscated six years ago on a school bus. "Here's an organization that claims to have instances of gross violations, 4,000 calls a month. Yet they continue to trot out this case that's six years old, and that was solved with one phone call. . . . These stories are circulated and talked about to get people worked up into a frenzy."

The Rutherford Institute can do the good work of securing religious liberty and promoting its view of morality without compromising its principles or retreating from public life altogether. Other groups have made admirable, if imperfect, efforts to dissociate conservative religious views from hateful utterances. Rutherford, by contrast, seems to want it both ways. Its angry, alarmist rhetoric reaches more people than the briefs it has filed in federal courthouses, and this rhetoric militates against any understanding between fearful Christians and cynical secularists. Rutherford's contradictions exemplify the contradictions of the Christian right. Any serious work Rutherford and its followers do in opening up the public square to believers is compromised by what they say when they step into the public square themselves. □

Rutherford's  
contradictions  
exemplify the  
contradictions  
of the Christian  
right.

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# TAKE THE INITIATIVE, PLEASE

## REFERENDUM MADNESS IN CALIFORNIA

BY PETER SCHRAG

**B**y now the best chicken-and-egg argument in California politics is: Which came first, the unresponsiveness, arrogance, and incompetence of California's elected politicians or the orgy of initiatives designed to bypass cretin government and set things straight? What's certain is that ever since the passage of Proposition 13, the mother of all latter-day tax revolts, in June 1978, the state has been locked into a vicious cycle in which each plebiscitary reform, by either mandating or prohibiting certain policies, has sharply reduced the discretion of elected officials. This, in turn, has made it still harder for local and state government to respond to new problems, thus bringing still more pressure for extraordinary ballot measures. In November, there will be another turn of the wheel—and a big one at that—with consequences that will reverberate far beyond the Sierras.

Californians approved only two initiatives in the 1950s and three in the 1960s. In the 1970s, they approved 7; in the 1980s, the total reached 21; and so far 15 have already been approved in the 1990s, with a dozen more on the ballot for this November and the whole 1998 cycle still to come. Many of the recently enacted measures go to the very heart of the governmental process: tax and spending limits; legislative term limits; a minimum-spending formula requiring the legislature to spend at least 40 percent of the state's general fund for public schools; a variety of costly tough-on-crime mandatory-sentencing bills, including a sweeping three-strikes law (which was passed even after the legislature had already passed an identical law); Proposition 187 (so far blocked by the courts), which would deny schooling and other public services to illegal immigrants; a set of measures requiring the state to issue bonds for specified park, conservation, and public transit projects; a law regulating auto insurance; another regulating the use and labeling of toxic materials; and yet another raising the tobacco tax to fund antismoking campaigns and support research on smoking-related diseases; and many more.

It was the leaders of the California tax revolt,

Howard Jarvis and Paul Gann, and their consultants who pioneered the use of the new campaign technologies in getting their antitax measures on the ballot—targeted direct mail campaigns, market testing of initiative proposals, the use of paid signature gatherers, who now earn as much as \$1.50 for each of the million or so signatures required to get a proposed constitutional amendment on the ballot, the linking of fundraising with signature gathering—but it didn't take environmentalists and other groups on the left long to catch up, and to invent a few wrinkles of their own. Anyone can play this game, though for reasons that should be obvious, the biggest players these days tend to be industry and professional groups—insurance, tobacco, trial lawyers.

Given the political and financial effectiveness of these techniques, it shouldn't be surprising that there will be at least a dozen more initiatives on the state's November ballot: the already influential California Civil Rights Initiative (CCRI), which would bar race or gender preferences in public employment, contracting, and education; a labor-sponsored initiative raising the state's minimum wage; two competing campaign finance reform proposals, one from Common Cause, the other

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from Ralph Nader's Public Interest Research Group (PIRG), the latter containing a poison pill designed to destroy the former if PIRG's initiative passes; two lawyer-sponsored measures regulating (and blocking more severe restrictions on) attorneys' fees, one of them an open sesame to virtually unlimited securities fraud lawsuits; a sweeping measure to prohibit all local taxes and fees not specifically authorized by voters; another regulating HMOs; and still another legalizing the medical use of marijuana.

**W**hat is new, or relatively new, is that, contrary to traditional patterns in this country, California's down-ballot measures are increasingly influencing—and being consciously used in attempts to influence—the races at the top of the ticket: They draw certain kinds of voters to the polls and they can be deployed to exploit the weaknesses of opponents. California Governor Pete Wilson got a reputation as a political genius by successfully using the three-strikes initiative and Proposition 187 as political wedges against Democrat Kathleen Brown in his 1994 gubernatorial re-election campaign—the polls showed that Brown's opposition to 187 damaged her—just as he had used various tough-on-crime initiatives in prior elections. Clearly that's the tactic Republicans had in mind this year when they raised \$450,000 to put CCRI on the 1996 ballot: Had things gone right, CCRI might not only have been the fatal wedge dividing the Democratic coalition—minorities and civil rights groups on one side, Reagan Democrats and other blue-collar voters on the other—but it might also have denied California's crucial 54 electoral votes to Bill Clinton, thereby determining the outcome of the presidential election itself.

In the past six months, CCRI has lost a great deal of its political luster. Wilson, who tried last fall and winter to use immigration and affirmative action in his short-lived presidential campaign, went down in flames. Business groups conspicuously (though not surprisingly) stayed away from the initiative, and Bob Dole, who had jumped on

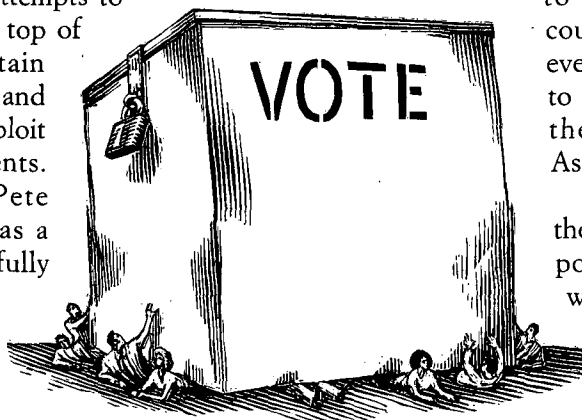
the anti-affirmative action bandwagon a year ago, began to shy away from it. (The reason may have less to do with race than with the mounting focus of CCRI opponents on the gender issue, where Dole continues to be particularly vulnerable.) He, too, had been a backer of affirmative action, he told a television interviewer recently; now, he said, "I think there are some changes that should be made." To some on the right, that sounded suspiciously like "mend but don't end it." CCRI is still likely to pass—all the polls still have it leading by roughly 60 percent to 35 percent—but its potential as a wedge seems to have declined considerably, a classic case of something whose support is a mile wide and an inch deep. A few weeks ago the same California Republicans who ponied up the money

to get CCRI on the ballot couldn't muster enough votes even from their own members to get a CCRI facsimile out of the GOP-controlled State Assembly.

But this does not mean these initiatives have lost their political effectiveness. Here's where the left seems to have learned from the right.

As CCRI's potential for drawing conservative voters to the polls appears to shrink, two liberal measures—the labor-sponsored initiative raising the minimum wage in California to \$5.75 over the next two years, and a proposal, backed by public employee groups, to raise the marginal tax rates on high incomes from 9.5 percent to 11 percent—may do for Democrats some of what CCRI was supposed to do for Republicans: get marginal or indifferent Democratic voters to vote in what they would otherwise have considered to be an unimportant election, and force Republicans to choose between their business constituents and those angry white males.

Other initiatives might also have potent effects. The Right to Vote on Taxes Act, sponsored by the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association, the group started by (and now named for) the curmudgeonly patron saint of the tax revolt, could bring out the still formidable residue of California's antitax movement, tens of thousands of cranky people chafing at the higgledy-piggledy system of developer fees, utility taxes, lighting assessments, and the





various other property assessments and levies that cities and other local agencies have contrived to get around the tax limitations imposed by Proposition 13 and its successors. In effect the measure, which would be added to the California constitution, would require a popular vote, either by majority or supermajority depending on the nature of the tax, on any new local levy. It would, in addition, eliminate a number of existing exactions if they are not ratified by local majorities and it would absolutely prohibit using fees for any purposes other than what they are imposed for. Some local officials say, perhaps with more than a touch of hyperbole, that if the Right to Vote on Taxes Act is passed, it will make the effects of Proposition 13 "look like a picnic."

It's now 85 years since Hiram Johnson and his fellow Progressives managed to write the initiative, referendum, and recall into the California constitution as a means of checking the power of "the interests"—specifically the Southern Pacific Railroad—and their lackeys in the legislature. But Johnson could hardly have imagined how that device, harnessed to modern campaign technologies, could be used by the very politicians and interests it was meant to check. A few years ago, the state's Planning and Conservation League, pushing an environmentalist bond initiative to fund more rail and other public transit, got \$500,000 for its campaign from that same Southern Pacific, which expected to get some of the bond money so that it could upgrade its tracks with public money. In 1988 the insurance industry spent \$88 million on five California auto insurance initiatives, more than George Bush spent on his entire presidential campaign.

But the more important development is the way the initiative, which for a half century was regarded as an extraordinary expedient available in the rare cases of serious legislative failure or abuse, has not just been integrated into the regular governmental-political system, but has begun to replace it. Some students of California government think it's easier to amend the state constitution by initiative than to approve budgets or raise taxes, both of which require two-thirds votes in the legislature. Whether or not that's correct, the initiative

has by general agreement become the principal driver of policy in California, sometimes for the good, but more often not. The cumulative effect of the plebiscitary reforms of the past two decades has been to strip cities, school districts, and especially counties of their ability to generate their own funds; to divide authority and responsibility uncertainly between state and local government and among scores of agencies; and to make it increas-

ingly unclear who is ultimately accountable for the results of all these changes. That has put ever more emphasis on plebiscitary democracy—both as a device and as political ethic—to cut through the gridlock and confusion. And as each measure adds its mandates, takes money (in a process known as ballot-box budgeting) out of the budget

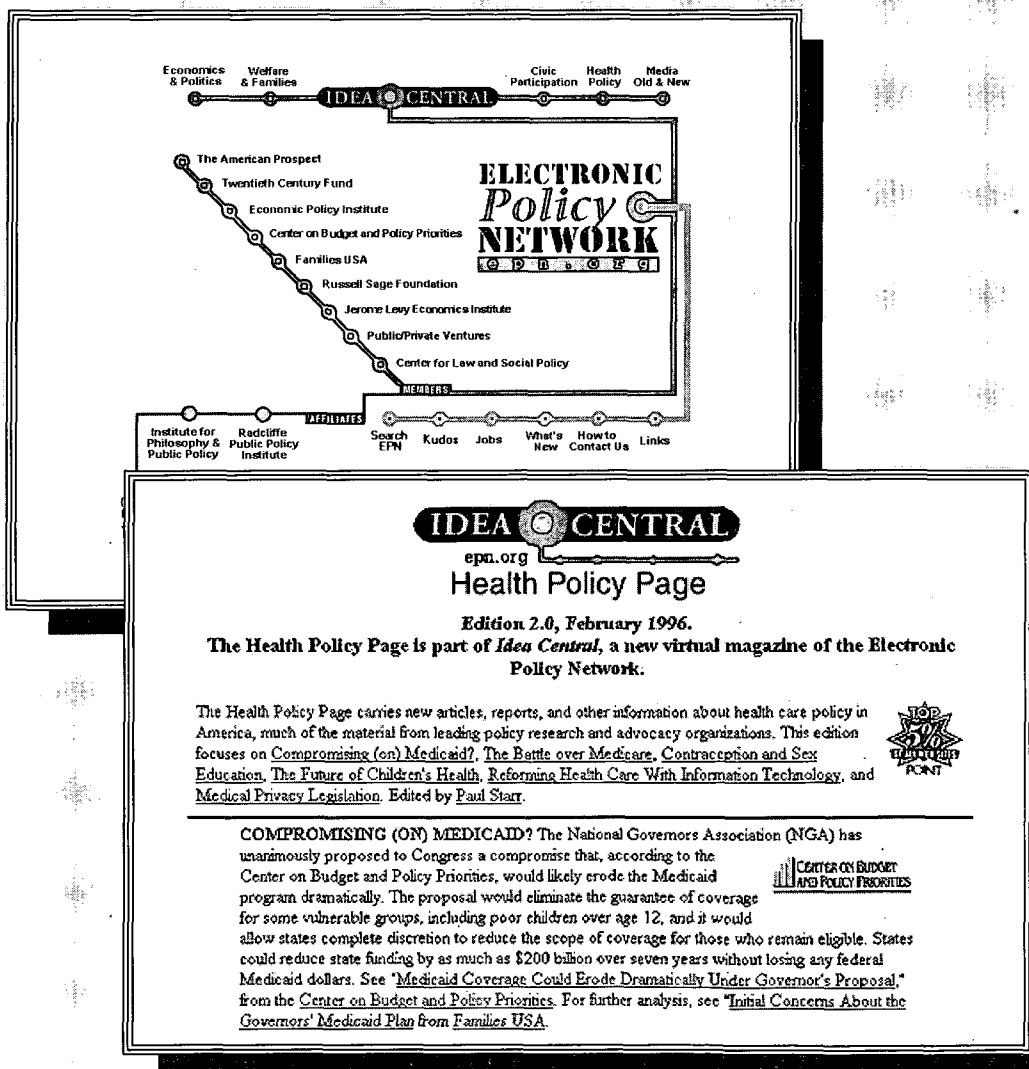
and sets it aside for special purposes, or otherwise restricts legislative choices, it becomes still harder for voters to know whom to hold accountable and what rascals to throw out—which of course is one reason that voters enacted term limits, and thus made certain that every few years they all get thrown out.

Which brings us back to November 1996. While it's still far too early to know how the down-ballot issues will influence the election, there's no doubt that they have become an increasing factor in the calculations and plans of California politicians. Where else in America do state-level candidates not only campaign on initiatives but, as Wilson and former Democratic Lieutenant Governor Leo McCarthy have done, sponsor them as platform vehicles on which to run? Clearly that was the plan when Wilson and his political ally, Sacramento businessman Ward Connerly, went all out earlier this year to get CCRI on the ballot, and when Wilson embraced Proposition 187, the immigration initiative, and Proposition 184, the three-strikes measure, in 1994. Just as clearly the minimum-wage measure has been—and will be—a crucial part of the Democrats' strategic calculations this year. The results of these down-ballot contests might not just reverberate around the nation, as they occasionally have in the past; if the race tightens, they could determine the next president of the United States.□

The ballot initiative is not just integrated into our political system; it has begun to replace it.

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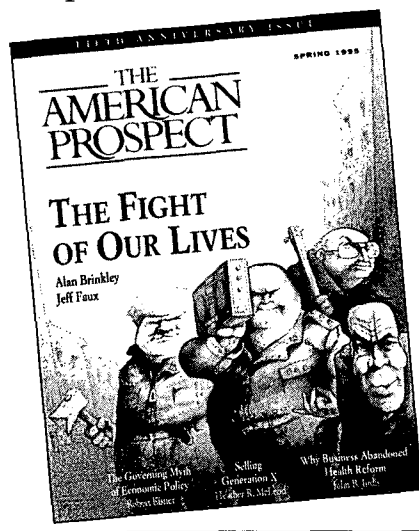


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# DELIVERING FOR YOUNG FAMILIES

## THE RESONANCE OF THE GI BILL

BY THEDA SKOCPOL

**A**s Bob Dole's generation eases into retirement, commentators of various stripes complain loudly about generational bias in American social policy. The fiscally conservative Concord Coalition—along with independent presidential contenders Ross Perot and Richard Lamm—complains that working-age taxpayers have to cover the costs of overly generous social programs for America's elderly. The Children's Defense Fund calls upon Americans to "stand for children," marshaling facts and figures to show that the nation invests way too little to help poor children and young families. Antigovernment Republicans arrayed behind Newt Gingrich, Dick Armey, and John Kasich assert that we must cut way back on federal government spending for the poor and the elderly in order to preserve the American dream for "our children and grandchildren."

Each of these proponents of generational equity is speaking to a gaping "missing middle" in U.S. social policy. In recent decades, very little has been done through the federal government to help young adults and their children. The United States has no inclusive system of family allowances or benefits. Retired elderly Americans are eligible for relatively generous benefits through Social Security and Medicare, and very poor, mother-headed families may get Medicaid, food stamps, and Aid to Families with Dependent Children. Most working-age Americans, however, relate to the federal government as taxpayers, not as participants in broad social programs. Many do not even have health insurance coverage.

But working-age Americans could be

beneficiaries, too—and not so long ago they were. For a time after World War II, U.S. federal social provision was much more balanced across the life cycle, largely due to the GI Bill, first enacted in 1944. Comprehensive individual and family benefits were made available to about 16 million World War II veterans; subsequent "little GI Bills" following the wars in Korea and Vietnam extended similar, though less generous, benefits to later cohorts of former military enlistees. All in all, the GI Bill added up to a major federal social policy in the postwar era.

Though the nature and value of the GI Bill's contributions to American social provision have generally been forgotten, Bill Clinton remains clearly fascinated by the 1944 precedent. In April 1995, as the new Republican congressional majority basked in what it claimed was a mandate to

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reverse key legacies of the New Deal, Clinton gave a speech at FDR's Warm Springs retreat. The GI Bill, Clinton said, was Roosevelt's "most enduring legacy" because it "gave generations of veterans a chance to get an education, to build strong families and good lives and to build the nation's strongest economy ever, to change the face of America."

No question, the accomplishments of this legislation resonate strongly today. Its best elements may well be worth "reinventing." But Bill Clinton, despite his obvious reverence for the GI Bill, may not yet have found the best way to recreate its scope and spirit for a new era.

### BREAKING THE MOLD

Millions of Americans worry about getting the training and education they need to compete for good jobs in a national economy increasingly unforgiving toward the less formally educated and those without up-to-date skills. Against this backdrop it is easy to understand Clinton's nostalgia for the GI Bill. Through this law some \$14.5 billion federal dollars were spent between 1944 and 1956 to help just over half of the returning World War II veterans (some 7.8 million people) obtain vocational training or higher education, preparing them for occupations ranging from skilled industrial trades to engineering, medicine, law, and business.

Unlike previous federal expenditures on education—such as the Morrill Act of 1862, which subsidized land-grant colleges—benefits under the GI Bill flowed directly to individuals in the form of grants for tuition, supplies, and living expenses. The GI Bill authorized tuition for up to \$500 a year, which was at that time sufficient to pay for even prestigious private colleges. Individuals could choose from among the best kinds of training or education to which they could gain admission. Nearly two and a quarter million World War II veterans—many of whom would not have been able or motivated to pursue higher education—attended colleges and universities courtesy of the GI Bill.

The vets proved to be unusually serious and successful students, and their huge influx in the late 1940s permanently transformed the American university system. Only about 9 out of 100 young peo-

ple attended college in 1939, but that rate almost doubled (to 16 out of a hundred) by 1947. American higher education expanded into an avenue for mass mobility rather than gentlemanly certification.

In addition to educational benefits, GI families were provided modest allowances while vets pursued their studies, as well as loans for purchasing homes or farms or setting up new businesses. GI loans helped some 4.3 million vets purchase residences in the decade after World War II. Under the 1944 GI Bill and its successors, some one-fifth of postwar mortgages for single-family homes came to be subsidized by the Veterans Administration, and practices in the long-term mortgage market were changed in ways that opened up loans to many nonveterans as well.

The GI Bill broke the mold of earlier U.S. social policies. As I have recounted in my book *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States*, prior to the 1930s the chief efforts in U.S. social provision helped aging men, especially former soldiers on the Union side of the Civil War, and dependent mothers and children. Male breadwinners were mostly left out. Nor did the story entirely

change with the New Deal: The Social Security Act of 1935 featured benefits for the elderly and did relatively little for wage earners in their prime. By contrast, the GI Bill authorized massive federal investments in young men right at the start of their lives as workers and providers for families.

But the impact of the GI Bill was cohort-bound. Once the young veterans of World War II (and those of Korea and Vietnam) had passed through the system, federal public investments in young workers dissipated too. Meanwhile, Social Security and, later on, Medicare incorporated more and more employees. Today, the retired elderly and some poor mothers and children partake of federal social spending. But most young adults pay—their substantial payroll taxes are collected to finance Social Security and Medicare for their retired parents and grandparents.

The problem is not that too much is being done for the elderly. The real problem is that too little is being done to invest in younger Americans. For

The problem today is not too much for the elderly but too little for the young.

progressives, the challenge is to rearrange policy in ways that preserve decent and solidaristic security protections for all of America's elderly, while at the same time giving working-age adults and their children more of a positive stake in U.S. social policy. Conservatives address nonelderly Americans as oppressed taxpayers who need to get government off their backs. This approach delivers concrete benefits only to the well-to-do, but it resonates with many less-privileged adults, especially working men, who are more aware of government as the recipient of the tax money they pay than as a source of support for their own efforts in workplaces and family life. Progressives must find new ways to get government on the side of working parents, the way the GI Bill once was.

Before considering how the GI Bill could serve as an inspiration for the future, let us briefly look back at why this unusual social legislation was enacted in the first place.

#### SUMMER OF '44

The United States has a long history of remarkable generosity to veterans and survivors of its major wars. But benefits for able-bodied veterans have usually been granted long after the war in question—not until the veterans became elderly and accumulated sufficient political clout did they tap significantly into the federal treasury. In addition, benefits for able-bodied veterans were traditionally either pensions or bonuses, not educational grants or support for young families.

Moreover, the experience of World War I veterans did not bode well for soldiers returning from a second global war 25 years later. In 1919, U.S. officers and soldiers from the World War I Expeditionary Force launched the American Legion, which in due course enrolled between 15 percent and 25 percent of all World War I vets and spread more than 10,000 local posts across all of the states. Despite such strength, however, the Legion waged frustrating and often unsuccessful battles over veterans' benefits with both Republican and Democratic presidents of the 1920s and 1930s.

President Franklin Roosevelt was even more

reluctant than his Republican predecessors to endorse expenditures on World War I veterans. Explaining his decision to trim veterans' benefits in response to the Depression, FDR boldly told the American Legion Convention in 1933 that "no person, because he wore a uniform must thereafter be

placed in a special class of beneficiaries over and above other citizens." "Greater and broader concerns of the American people have a prior claim for our consideration at this time," Roosevelt further explained when vetoing a bonus bill in May 1935. "The veteran who suffers from this depression can best be aided by the rehabilitation of the nation as a whole. . . ."

Once the New Deal was overtaken by mobilization for war, Roosevelt acknowledged that

steps would need to be taken to compensate for the disruptions suffered by millions of young draftees. Yet the plans for postwar demobilization hatched by his administration and its liberal allies consistently sought to address the needs of veterans in the context of building a stronger welfare state for all Americans. The initial benefits proposed by the Roosevelt administration were not nearly as generous as those ultimately authorized by the GI Bill. After consultations with university leaders, the President called in 1943 for an educational benefit limited to one year, with only a minority of veterans selected for more college through a combination of merit criteria, quotas distributed across the states, and federal planners' estimates of needs for specific kinds of trained manpower. This would have been an elitist and centrally managed approach to educational grants.

The GI Bill of 1944 was as much the product of popular pressures on Congress as of New Deal liberalism. The idea came from the American Legion, which proposed omnibus legislation in January 1944, calling for a "Bill of Rights for GI Joe and GI Jane." This proposal uniquely combined provision for the disabled, a full year's worth of unemployment benefits, up to four years of educational benefits open to virtually all veterans, and generous low-interest loans to finance homes, farms, and businesses. The Legion's bold approach stimulated the national

The GI Bill was a compromise between liberal policy aspirations and conservative populist pressures.

publicity and grassroots pressure on Congress that moved legislative decisionmaking over many obstacles during 1944.

The American Legion was in many ways an unlikely sponsor of such a major expansion of the welfare state. Inspired by what may seem a parochial understanding of patriotism, the Legion of the 1920s and 1930s was virulently opposed to leftists, civil libertarians, and labor unions. Although the Legion was officially nonpartisan, it typically operated in partnership with Republicans and conservative Democrats.

Yet the American Legion was also a grassroots voluntary civic organization that engaged popular loyalties in towns and cities across America. Particularly when the needs of former soldiers were at stake, the Legion espoused a populist—and not a fiscally stingy—version of conservatism, denouncing greedy businessmen and tight-fisted Republicans as well as leftists and unionists. Moreover, having decided in 1942 to open its ranks to World War II veterans, the Legion was suddenly very attentive to the needs of the young. Prior to World War II, each major American war generated a new set of veterans' organizations that grew old with the survivors of that conflict. The American Legion broke this pattern. By proving to soldiers returning from World War II that it could address their needs, it attracted millions of new members to replenish its ranks as World War I vets aged and died.

Legion populism prodded congressional conservatives in new directions. For example, John Rankin of Mississippi, the chairman of the crucial House Veterans Affairs Committee, opposed year-long transitional benefits for all veterans, and favored limited severance bonuses and educational grants. Rankin was reluctant to send millions of GIs to become "overeducated and undertrained" studying with "red" professors in "certain" colleges and universities. Why, after all, would it be in the interests of congressional conservatives to subsidize the expansion of U.S. higher education after World War II?

To overcome such conservative reservations, American Legion posts throughout the land bombarded their congressmen with letters and telegrams, and mounted a national petition drive that garnered more than a million signatures, outmaneuvering Rankin. The American Legion of the 1940s, therefore, deserves as much credit as FDR for the huge federal investments in higher educa-

tion and youthful family formation that were embodied in the GI Bill.

## COULD IT HAPPEN AGAIN?

Conditions in the United States today seem to cry out for a new version of the GI Bill. Post-high school training and higher education carry a greater premium than ever before. Most families—middle-class as well as poor ones—have to struggle to finance costly but essential educations for their offspring. New federal investments might widen opportunities and mitigate the impact of market forces that are steadily increasing gaps between the very privileged and everyone else.

Fascinated by the 1944 precedent, Bill Clinton has repeatedly tried to reinvent aspects of the GI Bill. In the October 1991 speech announcing his presidential candidacy in Little Rock, Clinton extravagantly promised to pass "a domestic GI Bill that would give every young American the chance to borrow the money necessary to go to college and ask them to pay it back either as a small percentage of their income over time or through national service as teachers or

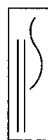
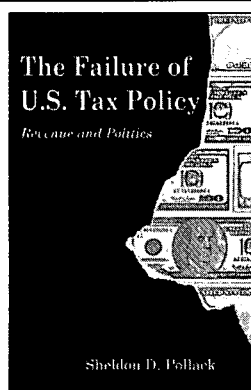
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policemen or nurses or child care workers."

In addition, Clinton wanted to work with educational institutions to offer federal loans directly to students, eliminating private banks as costly and cumbersome middlemen. After graduation, students would repay loans over many years as a percentage of their earnings, with higher-income people ultimately paying more and lower-income earners less. The establishment of such "income-contingent" direct loans would lay a crucial basis for socially inclusive and mildly redistributive educational expenditures as the United States moves into the twenty-first century. Young people would not be forced into certain occupations just to pay for costly loans, and the repayments would become more manageable for all families.

Clinton's campaign dreams soon met the realities of governance. Faced with severe budgetary constraints, the 1993-94 Clinton administration had to retrench. Yet as Steven Waldman recounts in his engaging book *The Bill*, President Clinton persuaded the 103rd Congress to establish a modest version of his AmeriCorps national service pro-

gram, even as the President and his congressional allies battled fierce opposition from the banking industry to establish direct income-contingent loans for a portion of federal educational spending.

But then came the Republican triumphs of 1994. Determined to roll back the domestic role of the federal government, insurgent Republicans marching behind House Speaker Newt Gingrich targeted both AmeriCorps and direct federal lending. President Clinton has waged rear-guard actions to defend scaled-back versions of these programs, but he has had a hard time coming up with any overall vision of a major federal role in redistributive social investment in education.

Since 1994 the President has tossed out a variety of proposals, with little apparent coherence. He has touted \$10,000 tax deductions for expenditures on higher education by middle-class families, more Pell Grants for very poor students, and \$1,000 merit scholarships for the top 5 percent of graduates in every high school. Most recently, in a speech at the June 1996 graduation ceremonies at Princeton University, Clinton called for yet another kind of federal educational benefit: \$1,500 in refundable tax credits (available to families with annual incomes up to \$100,000) for "America's Hope Scholarships" covering the first two years of college tuition. This latest proposal would help families of modest means. Perhaps it could serve as a framework for a broadly inclusive approach to federal educational subsidies open to more-privileged and less-privileged Americans alike.

Meanwhile, the Clinton administration may have trivialized the rubric of a new GI Bill by turning it into a mere rhetorical label for yet another, unrelated initiative. The administration seeks to convert all existing federal job training and retraining programs into \$2,600 vouchers to be given to displaced workers eligible for federal aid. In both his 1994 and 1995 State of the Union addresses, President Clinton labeled this worthy but narrow reorganization a "GI Bill for America's workers"—thus shifting morally potent symbolism away from his ideas about service and direct loans for most American young people.

**I**n today's climate of inherited federal debt and unending political rhetoric hostile to taxes, people find it hard to envisage major new federal initiatives. Imagination fails amidst an apparent national consensus about balancing the

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budget and in the face of looming debates over restructuring Social Security. Clinton and Congress may retreat to making educational gestures along the grain of inherited programs: grants for the very poor versus tax credits and guaranteed loans for the middle class.

But there might be a better way, combining moderate and progressive ideas already on the table, to proceed toward a new domestic GI Bill. Writing in the January-February 1995 issue of the Democratic Leadership Council magazine, the *New Democrat*, Peter Plastrik calls for a "GI Bill for Working Americans" combining "job opportunity vouchers" for the unemployed with an extension of the income-contingent loan program into a "skills line of credit" for any worker who wants to train (or retrain) for a better job. "Like its namesake," explains Plastrik, "a new GI Bill would create a vast learning enterprise controlled by its intended beneficiaries rather than bureaucrats," because workers as well as students would be able to use vouchers or income-contingent loans to obtain training from universities or community colleges, from private employers or vocational schools, or from training efforts run by voluntary groups or government agencies.

As Secretary of Labor Robert Reich has argued, making this system work would require the establishment of "one-stop shopping centers," clearinghouses where workers could go to learn about training choices and refer to standardized data on cost, quality, and job-placement results. Otherwise, Plastrik's plan could fall victim to some of the same problems that plagued noncollege training under the original GI Bill. During the 1940s, fly-by-night commercial vocational "schools" often sprang up to collect veterans' tuition grants, because the GI Bill provided no oversight or institutional infrastructure to ensure effectiveness or provide information about training options.

Although Plastrik's proposal appeared in an outlet sponsored by conservative Democrats, it overlaps with the more liberal ideas put forward in this magazine's pages in the summer of 1990. In "Generational Alliance: Social Security as a Bank for Education and Training," Barry Bluestone pro-

posed to link revisions of two great Franklin Roosevelt initiatives, the Social Security Act of 1935 and the GI Bill of 1944. Today the tax surpluses in the Social Security Trust Fund are used to cover federal government debt. They are not invested in ways that might produce higher rates of return. In Bluestone's vision, the Social Security Trust Fund would be partially invested in long-term loans to working-age adults, both students and mid-career adults.

Arguing that federal policy "can create a positive link between those coming of working age and those coming of retirement age," Bluestone hopes to achieve "generational equity not by retrenching on the elderly, but by putting our

reserves for the elderly to work for the entire society." Former students and retrained workers would repay their loans over a lengthy period in amounts corresponding to their actual incomes, yet set high enough on average to allow the Social Security Trust Fund to grow over time.

Of course, existing Trust Fund reserves will sharply attenuate after 2010, so Social Security alone would be insufficient to fund a permanent program of educational and job training loans. Nonetheless, Bluestone has put his finger on a worthy goal for progressives. We need to recapture the sense of national solidarity embodied in the original GI Bill, and find new ways to create a stake for working parents in a national system of public social provision that is currently highly skewed toward benefits for retirees.

Since 1994, clashing schemes for fundamentally revamping Medicare have been at the center of congressional and public debates. Soon the country will be embroiled in an equally fundamental debate about the future of Social Security. Without going over all of the details of alternative plans for reforming Social Security [see Robert Dreyfuss, "The Biggest Deal," and Joseph F. Quinn and Olivia S. Mitchell, "Social Security on the Table," *TAP*, May-June 1996], what's important to note is that many of them would quickly or gradually destroy the national-solidarity nature of the Social Security Trust Fund. Some conservatives would like to abolish Social Security altogether and create

We need to recapture the sense of national solidarity that was embodied in the original GI Bill.

instead a set of publicly mandated individual private investment accounts; this parallels far-right calls to dismantle Medicare in favor of individual medical savings accounts. Certain middle-of-the-road analysts, meanwhile, favor the creation of a two-tiered system for Social Security (and perhaps Medicare), combining flat public benefits with mandated individual savings accounts. Both the entirely individual and the two-tier schemes would jeopardize the significant redistributions from richer to poorer employees that now enable Social Security to provide decent and secure retirement benefits to Americans with average or less-than-average incomes during their working lives. Both kinds of schemes, moreover, would foster individualism, increased market competition, and heightened class inequalities. Yet such individual savings account plans for reforming both Social Security and Medicare may have a certain political appeal for younger American workers today, because these plans imply the (largely illusory) promise of reduced taxation and more individual control over savings for the future.

In the debates over revamping Social Security for the period after 2010, progressives tend to support collective investment options. Former Social Security Commissioner Robert Ball and others advocate allowing special, politically insulated trustees to invest a portion of the Social Security Trust Fund in stocks and bonds, not just government securities, in order to generate a higher rate of return to keep the trust fund solvent into the future. Barry Bluestone's educational loan plan can be seen as a variant of this approach, one that would invest Social Security surpluses not just in higher-yielding financial instruments, but also in loans that have immediate payoffs for younger adult Americans, as well as a positive effect on national economic growth. Perhaps, as the Social Security debate develops, there will turn out to be still other ways to maintain the solidaristic nature of the Social Security Trust Fund and give younger Americans a more direct stake in it—while at the same time promoting national economic growth and higher investment returns.

Either progressives will come up with ways to give younger Americans—especially working-age parents—a larger stake in doing things together through government, or conservative critics of government will soon succeed in dismantling the core

public social programs—Social Security and Medicare—in which the employed middle class has a stake.

**T**he history of the GI Bill suggests that, sometimes, surprising political alliances can come together to mark watersheds in the development of American public social provision. The GI Bill was not a purely, or even primarily, liberal New Deal policy. It was a compromise between liberal policy aspirations and popular pressures registered through Congress. At the close of the twentieth century, populist concerns remain up for grabs in American politics and public policymaking. Most Republicans can be expected to emphasize lower taxes and the dismantling of social spending programs in their quest to appeal to less-privileged working parents along with the rich. In response, Democrats of a progressive bent need to come up with imaginative ways to extend social benefits and investments to young families, building new political coalitions in the process.

The leadership of the American Association of Retired Persons has demonstrated an awareness during the 1990s that elderly beneficiaries of Social Security and Medicare have a stake in developing political alliances with supporters of social programs for younger Americans. Working hand in hand with groups ranging from populist moderates and some business groups to unionists and people with a vested interest in higher education, the AARP and kindred groups could pressure politicians and Congress, much as the American Legion once did. The battle pitting allegedly big-government liberals and elderly special interests against conservative advocates of choice and national economic growth might end. Progressives and populists could come together around their vision of "growth and security for all."

The real moral of this story is that progressives must not remain on the defensive in the face of burgeoning conservative attacks on government, taxes, and solidarity security programs. Americans who believe that the federal government can again be an agent of democratic destiny must come up with bold new ways to marry social entitlements and responsibilities, as the GI Bill once did so compellingly. Above all, new ways must be found to give young workers and families a strong moral and material stake in the future of American social provision.□

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# STARTING SMALL, THINKING BIG

BY IRVING B. HARRIS

**T**he United States spends more than \$500 billion each year on the education of 5- to 25-year-olds. Despite disagreement over specific strategies, investment in education commands broad public support. But one of the most basic building blocks of the educational system suffers from broad neglect: very young children.

Social science and biological research have shown that the most rapid and significant developmental phase of life is the period from conception to age five. In fact, setting young at-risk children on paths of stable development during this period may be our best hope for breaking the cycle of poverty. Our public school system presumes that students will enter kindergarten around age five poised to begin learning. A five-year-old arriving in kindergarten with developmental, health, or behavioral problems that impede learning is at a disadvantage that will likely only worsen with age. In addition,

the more developmentally delayed children there are in a classroom, the more effort the teacher has to steal from the children who otherwise would learn successfully.

## WHEN IS IT TOO LATE?

Intervention at the high school level generally comes far too late to help the developmentally delayed in a cost-efficient way. Even intervention in elementary school comes too late for most problem children. This means we should start before kindergarten. Often even age three is too late. People who operate Head Start programs, which are geared to three-, four-, and five-year-olds, say that their programs' children can be divided into three groups. The top third has had good nurturing at home and would probably succeed in life even without Head Start. The middle group requires a great deal of effort, but it pays off: These children stay developmentally on track, when without Head Start they might not have. The lowest third requires heroics, and some may be all but beyond help. The only way to diminish the size of this last group is to work with the mothers of these

children from the time they are born, or even six or nine months before that.

Until we recognize where the problem is—long before age six—we will continue to see school failures. The problem is not just schools, but school readiness. To be ready for school, the children have to be healthy. They need appropriate language skills. They must be ready for the social experience of school. They must know how to cooperate with other children, be respectful of the teacher, and understand the importance of doing well in school. To ensure that more children arrive at school ready to learn, we need to invest more in the health, early stimulation, and nurturing of every child born at high risk of failure.

**Teenage mothers.** Part of the challenge, of course, is preventing unwanted births to adolescents. More than 90 out of every 1,000 teenage girls in this country have babies every year—the highest rate in the industrialized world. Pregnant teens, still children themselves, are much less likely to obtain prenatal care than older mothers, greatly increasing the chances that their babies will be born with medical problems and developmental delays. Helping teenage mothers make responsible

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choices about family planning will go a long way to reducing the number of at-risk children entering the school system.

**Flunking kindergarten.** In 1984, Minneapolis school superintendent Richard Green tried an experiment. He refused to allow a student to go into tenth grade unless he or she had satisfactorily completed all ninth-grade work. Green set up a matriculation test at the end of ninth grade and did the same thing for seventh grade, fifth grade, second grade, and kindergarten. The number of students failing the test was sadly and predictably high. But the most surprising result of this endeavor was that 10 percent of the kindergarten class flunked—one in ten six-year-olds was considered “not ready” for first grade. Indeed, a friend who teaches kindergarten in the Chicago public schools believes, in fact, that more than 20 percent of the children she sees are not ready for school. But we do not have the luxury of closing the school door to those unprepared youngsters whose unpreparedness is contagious; public education by definition is open to everyone.

A 1991 report prepared under the direction of Ernest Boyer of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Learning titled *Ready to Learn: A Mandate for the Nation*, based on surveys of 7,000 kindergarten teachers, found that 35 percent of five-year-olds were not ready for school when they entered kindergarten. A report published that same year by Lucile Newman of Brown University and S. Buka of the Harvard School of Public Health stated that 12 percent of children were learning impaired before reaching kindergarten due to preventable causes such as malnutrition, lead poisoning, low birthweight, and alcohol and drug abuse during pregnancy.

**T**raditionally, parents have been responsible for bringing up children to be ready for school at age five or six. Unfortunately, many parents have little capacity to prepare their children for school. There is no way for the state's care to substitute completely for the nurturing and love that a parent or close relative brings to the child. But our society has done a poor job of doing what it can to help parents (especially parents living in poverty) nurture and stimulate the child in the critical years of life before the child starts school.

Humans attain a surprisingly large fraction of

their physical height while still very young. In fact, we attain half of our mature height by age two and a half. If the problem were that adult Americans were too short, would anyone suggest improving the eating habits of 16-year-olds to make them taller? Human intelligence also develops at this decelerating rate. A study at the University of Chicago has shown that by the age of four, most of a human's IQ is already in place. The study's author, Benjamin Bloom, concluded, “General intelligence appears to develop as much from conception to age four as it does during the 14 years from age 4 to age 18.” T. Berry Brazelton, the renowned Harvard pediatrician, says he can tell by examining a nine-month-old infant whether that infant is likely to succeed or fail in school, simply by observing how that child approaches very simple tasks, such as playing with blocks.

## WHAT WORKS

Preparing these children for school long before kindergarten will require a much more successful effort on the part of parents and society than we have yet been able to mount. However, some successful programs point to strategies that work.

**Head Start.** Head Start, launched 30 years ago by Lyndon Johnson, was our country's first attempt to prevent the stunted physical, cognitive, psychological, and social growth that so often plagues the children of poverty. The long-range results of Head Start have in the main been positive: measurably fewer school dropouts, fewer arrests, fewer teen pregnancies, and more employment. Children in good preschool programs do better in school and are less likely to get in trouble as adolescents. But even with recent budget increases, only 62 percent of four-year-olds and 28 percent of three-year-olds who could have benefited from Head Start in 1994 actually got spaces in the program.

**The Yale Child Welfare Research Program.** In the early 1970s Sally Provence of Yale University set up an experimental preschool program, even more comprehensive than Head Start, in New Haven. Her skilled team worked intensively with 17 very poor children beginning when the infants left the hospital and continuing until they were 30 months of age, providing a great deal of family support in the form of child development specialists, social workers, and pediatric care. All but one of the chil-

dren (and that one had a learning disability) subsequently did well in school. In a follow-up study 17 years later, not one of the children had been in trouble with the law or presented a behavior problem at home or at school. The boys in the group, in particular, had much better school attendance records, and cooperated better with teachers, than comparable students in a control group.

### **The Family Development Research Program.**

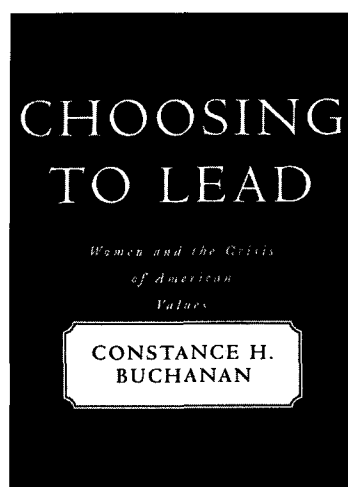
Another successful experiment with very early childhood care was the federally funded Family Development Research Program in Syracuse. Between 1969 and 1975, this program offered comprehensive services to 80 low-income families with children between 6 and 60 months of age. A population of expectant mothers and mothers of newborns was carefully selected: The families all had very low income and had little education; many were single-mother families. By age five, children in the experimental program showed statistically meaningful gains in their cognitive functioning compared to 80 control children. A longitudinal study looked at the children again when they were 15. Girls in the program continued to function at higher cognitive levels. The boys in the group, however, did not. The program director surmised that peer pressure from their classmates had militated against boys continuing to do well in school.

The boys in the program did, however, retain one principal measurable difference: their func-

tioning in society. While 22 percent of the nonprogram children who could be found at age 15 had been placed under supervision of the probation department, only 6 percent of the program children had been. The children not in the program ended up costing society more than 10 times as much as the children in the program: an average cost of \$186 per child for court processing, probation charges, supervision, and detention for those in the program group compared to an estimated \$1,985 per child in the control group.

Moreover the severity of the offenses committed by the control group far exceeded those committed by the program group. The offending program children were mainly described as "ungovernable" but had committed no serious offenses. The kids in the control group, on the other hand, were charged with burglary, assault, robbery, sexual abuse, and petty larceny—a clear warning of much higher costs to come from later prison sentences.

**Enhancing the outcomes of low-birthweight, premature infants.** Between 1987 and 1990 the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation funded major research to test the importance of nurturing babies born at low birthweights. Researchers at Stanford Medical School studied 985 children who had been born weighing less than five-and-a-half pounds. The results, published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, found that those children who received enhanced nurturing from biweekly home



### **CHOOSING TO LEAD**

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visits for the first year of life, and who during their second and third years attended a good preschool with just four children for every one teacher, had an average IQ of 98 at age three. The children who did not receive the home visiting and preschool experience had an average IQ of 85. A 13-point IQ differential can for many children be the difference between being retarded and being normal.

**Ounce of Prevention Fund Programs.** Private-public partnerships provide one model for early childhood development programs. Businesses realize that by investing in these programs, they are investing in the quality of the labor supply. I can speak from personal experience about one such partnership, the Ounce of Prevention Fund.

In 1982 I realized that if we could place a family support program near a factory site, a corporation's self-interest would warrant a substantial investment and might create a replicable model. The logical company to ask was Pittway Corporation, a manufacturer of First Alert smoke detectors in Aurora, Illinois, because I was then serving as its chairman. Aurora has a large pocket of poor families, many of whom worked at Pittway. The initial plan was for a three-year experiment with the idea of trying to influence other Aurora employers to become supporters. Greg Coler, director of Illinois's Department of Children and Family Services, agreed to commit \$400,000 to the center if Pittway would match it. This private-public partnership became the Ounce of Prevention Fund.

In 1984 and again in 1987 the state substantially raised its investment in the fund so that today Illinois contributes \$8 million annually. The private sector provides an additional \$2 million each year. The federal government adds nearly \$6 million to the fund through its contributions to Head Start and Early Head Start programs administered by the Ounce of Prevention Fund. The fund now runs 45 prevention programs. Fund sites generally offer home visiting, parent training, pregnancy prevention, support mechanisms to promote healthy family functioning and prevent child abuse and neglect, and infant and toddler care.

While it is difficult to assess precisely the effectiveness of this type of program, some results are clear. Immunization rates for six-month-olds increased from 40 percent to more than 95 percent. Second pregnancies to teenage mothers were reduced by 40 percent. And 85 percent of teenage

mothers in the program remained in school or returned to school within a year compared to only 62 percent of teen mothers not in the program.

Clearly there are programs that can work, but there are no magic bullets. We must be realists: These programs are difficult and costly to implement. They will require many, many trained people. At the present time, there is an enormous shortage of well-trained public health nurses, social workers, and early childhood development specialists. Part of this shortage results from depressed salary scales in early education. We pay teachers in child care and preschool much less than we pay janitors. We need to encourage higher status—and higher pay—for early childhood educators.

## INVESTING IN THE FUTURE

It is no secret that warm, loving parental care is the best policy for the child. The challenge is to help the parents who have trouble providing it. But the programs that can help are seriously underfunded. While we have doubled our expenditures on educating 5- to 25-year-olds over the last ten years, to \$500 billion, we're spending only \$4 billion on Head Start and 95 percent of that is on the years three, four, and five. Only \$100 million gets spent on birth through three years, which is where our emphasis should be. Only \$100 million out of \$500 billion is spent on the period when the most significant development takes place—that's one-fifth of one-one-thousandth of what we spend on ages 5 through 25.

The French, by contrast, spent \$7.12 billion in 1988 on publicly sponsored child care and education. A 1989 report of the French-American Foundation concludes, "If the United States were to commit equivalent public resources to child care and linked health services, this would total approximately \$23 billion per year." If we believe that our children are as important to our future as the French do, then why do we spend only one-sixth of what they spend per child?

Let's appreciate where our educational problems—dropout rates, illiteracy, poor math scores, and delinquency—begin: not in elementary school, not in kindergarten, but in the cradle and before. It costs an average of \$300,000 per person in prison and welfare expenses over the course of a lifetime when we fail to educate a child. Why aren't we spending the \$10,000 per person it takes to prevent early failure in children at risk?□

ROBERT KUTTNER

# Peddling Krugman

A generation ago, mainstream economics provided intellectual support for a mixed economy. Keynesianism gave legitimacy to macroeconomic intervention and public spending generally. The regulation of leading industries was anchored in the respectable economic ideas that many industries either were "natural monopolies" or displayed positive and negative spillovers not captured in market pricing. Social insurance and redistributive taxation enjoyed wide political support, and economists could explain why a more equal income distribution was good for growth as well as equity.

Today, nearly all of the mainstream economics profession, whether nominally Republican or Democratic, has become the ally of laissez-faire conservatism. This has partly to do with the latent reverence for markets at the heart of neoclassical economics. It also reflects a professional resentment of non-economists as policy intellectuals who don't adequately appreciate markets.

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The career of Paul Krugman epitomizes, if in extreme form, how the conventions of the economics profession work to block a resurgence of liberal activism. Krugman is a self-described liberal. Yet his counsel on a wide range of issues is that nothing can be done. And he is far more

ply-siders (both as intellectual frauds and as nonmembers of the neoclassical fraternity). He has also written forcefully, including in this journal, on the widening inequality of income and wealth. But for the most part his message is that public remedy is a futile pursuit. Thus, Krugman is the conservative's ideal liberal. He ridicules some of the most effective spokesmen for liberal economic policies, and he generally ratifies the conservative view that not much is worth trying because the market economy is doing about as well as it can.

While this posture is common to other centrist Democratic economists—Charles Schultz and Alice Rivlin immediately come to mind—Krugman takes it to an idiosyncratic extreme. Some of this is temperamental or characterological. At the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, to which Krugman will return this fall after two and a half years at Stanford, he was known as an *enfant terrible*—in both senses of the term.

Krugman habitually baits his intellectual siblings and parents as well as wayward non-economist cousins. A Krugman signature is to casually debunk a

## WORKS DISCUSSED IN THIS ESSAY:

Strategic Trade Policy and the New International Economics (collection) (MIT Press, 1986).

The Age of Diminished Expectations: U.S. Economic Policy in the 1990s (Washington Post Company, 1990).

Peddling Prosperity: Economic Sense and Nonsense in the Age of Diminished Expectations (W.W. Norton & Co., 1994).

Pop Internationalism (MIT Press, 1996).

charitable to very conservative fellow economists (Milton Friedman, Robert Lucas, Martin Feldstein) with whom he ostensibly disagrees than to fellow liberals such as Lester Thurow, Robert Reich, and Laura Tyson, whom he dismisses as pseudo-economists and mere "policy entrepreneurs." On close examination, his disdain is often less about serious policy differences than about membership in the right disciplinary club.

As a sometime liberal, Krugman is resolutely critical of sup-



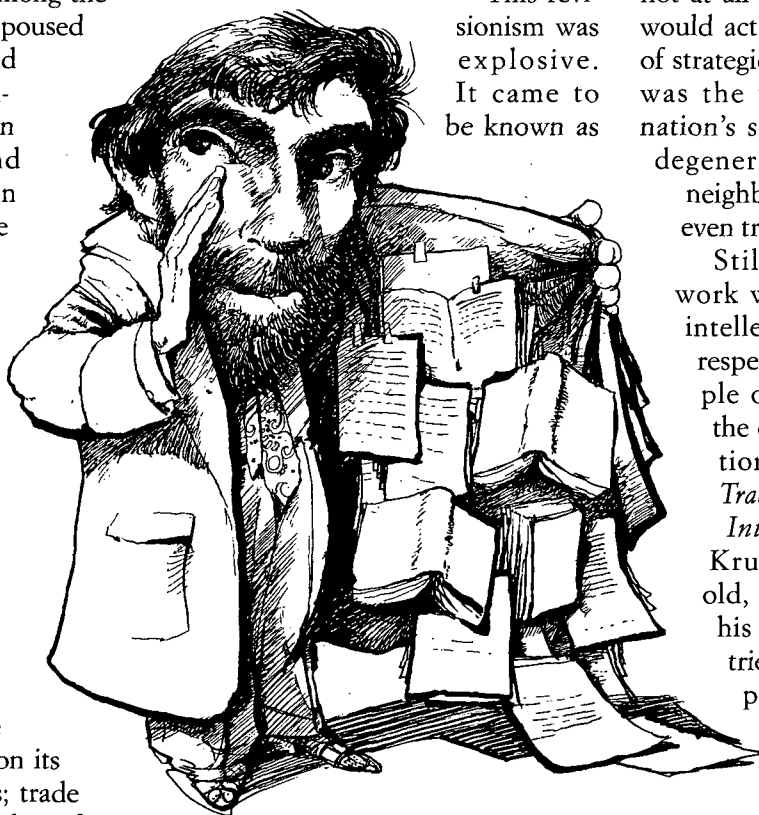
sacred precept of economic theory, but to warn, simultaneously, that this delicate work can be entrusted only to the licensed economist.

### TRADERS AND TRAITORS

Krugman first came to prominence as a critic of standard trade theory. Here he trod very carefully, since the theory of comparative advantage is among the most universally espoused tenets of standard economics. In technical papers written between 1983 and 1986, Krugman observed that the received wisdom about free trade was substantially wrong. In standard theory, countries trade to exploit natural differences of climate, skills, culture, resources, and so on. Each trading nation has a "comparative advantage" based on its set of endowments; trade allows nations to benefit from each other's natural strengths. While such natural endowments are still broadly relevant and while free trade is generally beneficial, Krugman wrote, since World War II "a large and generally growing part of world trade has come to consist of exchanges that cannot be attributed so easily to underlying advantages of the countries that export particular goods. Instead, trade seems to reflect arbitrary or

temporary advantages resulting from economies of scale or shifting leads in close technological races." In some cases, Krugman added, comparative advantage can be created. By strategically intervening to capture advantage in industries with technological dynamism, nations could produce spillover benefits for their economies.

This revisionism was explosive. It came to be known as



the "new view" of trade. It was, of course, not new to economic historians, to students of industrial policy, or to Japanese, Korean, French, and German mercantilist planners. But it was a highly heretical concept within mainstream American economics. Krugman had to be taken seriously, not just because he was a card-carrying neoclassical prodigy, but because he could demonstrate the proposition

more with reference to elegant algebraic models than with industrial and diplomatic history.

Having cautiously embraced this view, Krugman almost immediately (and prudently) distanced himself from its implications. His early writings warned that even though gains from industrial targeting and strategic trade policy were in principle possible, it was not at all clear that governments would act wisely in their pursuit of strategic advantage. And there was the usual risk that each nation's strategic efforts would degenerate into "beggar-my-neighbor trade policies" and even trade war.

Still, Krugman's early work was impressive for its intellectual courage and its respectful tone toward people of differing views. As the editor of a 1986 collection of papers, *Strategic Trade Policy and the New International Economics*, Krugman, then 33 years old, generously concluded his introduction, "I have tried to make all of these positions sound reasonable. The proponents of these views are

all honorable men (more accurately, there are honorable men in each group). Let us hope that the issue will in the end be decided as it ought to be, on the basis of evidence." More accurately still, the group included honorable men and women, one of whom was Laura Tyson, with whom Krugman would later cross swords; another was Barbara Spencer, who, with co-author James Spencer, originated the "new view." Such youthful

generosity, however, did not last. By the late 1980s, Krugman was railing against advocates of strategic trade and industrial policy, as dangerous opportunists and frauds.

### THE CONTRARIAN

Krugman's first book written for a general audience, *The Age of Diminished Expectations*, published in 1990 by the Washington Post Company, is an intriguing hybrid. It is part of the Post's series of stylish briefing books, intended for busy executives and opinion leaders. For someone who requires an entertaining refresher on Economics 101, the book is a crisp tour of the horizon, explicating basic economic concepts as they apply to current topics. It is gracefully written, and it immediately put Krugman in the small group of professional economists who write clear English for a lay public. This alone won Krugman respectful reviews.

The book also displays Krugman's impish, in-your-face contrarianism on many issues. Most of what policymakers and economists worry about, Krugman declares, is no big deal. Inflation? "[A] steady inflation rate of 4 or 5 percent does very little harm. We could live very nicely with it forever." Slow growth? It is dismal, but we have learned to live with it. The trade deficit and the foreign debt? "It would remain tolerable even if we continued borrowing at current rates for the rest of the century."

Even more surprisingly, given the work that put him on the intellectual map, Krugman poohpoohs the supposed menace of protectionism. "Even a severe trade conflict would have sur-

prisingly modest effects," he writes. "A tariff war that cut world trade *in half* would do no more economic damage than a mild recession." Krugman derives this conclusion, not implausibly, by taking the fraction of national income represented by trade, and then calculating how much trade really improves economic efficiency—not all that much.

Krugman sensibly urges the reader to appreciate that three things ultimately determine general prosperity: productivity, income distribution, and unemployment. "If these things are satisfactory, not much else can go wrong, while if they are not, nothing can go right." This is broadly true, yet Krugman's subtext, as suggested by his title, is that very little can be done to improve any of them. "Diminished expectations," it turns out, refers less to the public's rising anxiety about income stagnation than to Krugman's own world-weary fatalism.

Thus, "we don't really know why productivity growth ground to a near halt. That makes it hard to answer the other question. What can we do to speed it up?" His chapter on the subject concludes, "Productivity growth is the single most important factor affecting our economic well-being. But it is not a policy issue, because we are not going to do anything about it." Krugman couples this dismal conclusion with a warning. Watch out for "popular nostrums" by people "on the left," as Krugman characterizes Robert Reich (a "non-economist") and Lester Thurow (an "economic heretic"), as well as for supply-side

schemes by the likes of Arthur Laffer, an economist but a heretic, and Jude Wanniski "(a journalist)." According to Krugman, lumping the two groups together, "They offered free lunches—a chance to invigorate the economy without pain."

How about income distribution? Again, Krugman confirms that the rich have indeed been getting richer and the poor, poorer. But he offers the same disabling combination of professional hauteur—mistrust everyone but licensed economists—and depressing modesty: We experts just don't know what to do. "The most important causes of the growth in the underclass," he avers, "like the sources of the productivity slowdown, lie more in the domain of sociology than of economics." Sociology is Krugman code for unscientific. Of course, smart sociologists like William Julius Wilson have implicated declining wages in the growth of an underclass—surely more of an economic cause than a sociological one. But for Krugman it logically follows that if his brand of economic analysis cannot find an explanation, then anyone proposing solutions is a quack. His chapter on income distribution, like the one on productivity, concludes with the same counsel of despair: "The growing gap between rich and poor was arguably the central fact of economic life in America in the 1980s. But no policy changes now under discussion seem likely to narrow this gap significantly." Nor does Krugman offer other remedies not under current discussion.

His discussion of savings, investment, growth, and govern-

ment deficits is depressingly conventional and similarly pessimistic. Savings are the source of investment and investment is the source of growth, Krugman explains. If savings are low, growth will be low. He insists: "the only *reliable* way to raise national savings is to eliminate the budget deficit." It is of course true as an accounting identity that saving equals investment, but this is not the only possible direction of causality. Though he nominally embraces Keynes, Krugman ignores the possibility of a rather different, more Keynesian chain of cause and effect: public borrowing leading to increased investment; or higher wages leading to more demand for product, and then to more business investment in plant, equipment, and technology; and finally to a virtuous circle of higher wages, savings, investment, and growth. Again, he concludes (in this case mistakenly) on a note of hopelessness: "For the time being [1990], at least, tax increases are politically out of bounds. That means the budget deficit will remain a more or less permanent fixture on the American economic scene. . . . It is not only possible but probable that budget deficits at more or less the current level will continue for the rest of the century."

In reality, the budget deficit for fiscal year 1991, as Krugman was composing these words, was \$269.5 billion. Around the time the book appeared, President Bush agreed to a bipartisan deal reducing spending and raising taxes. Another large tax increase was successfully sponsored by the Clinton administration in 1993. Today the deficit is less

than half its 1990-91 level, and of course both parties (wrongly, in my view—but that's another story) are committed to its elimination by 2002.

### REICH, THUROW, AND WORSE

Three incipient Krugman trademarks were already apparent in *Diminished Expectations*: a stylized despair about policy activism; a penchant for debunking conventional economic wisdom; and a contempt for non-economists offering remedies. These conceits, however, are often at odds with each other, since much of the conventional economic wisdom Krugman challenges is the work of fellow economists.

The disdain for the non-economist policy advocate became more explicit in his 1994 book, *Peddling Prosperity*. The peddlers of Krugman's title are the unscientific policy hustlers of the left and right. Krugman describes a Manichaeian world in which there are two kinds of economists—"the professors and the policy entrepreneurs." The following extract nicely conveys the smugness of the whole book:

A professor can try to play entrepreneur—after all the rewards in both money and a sense of importance can be huge. Ultimately, however, she is at a disadvantage, because she is too constrained by her obscure professorly ethics. Some professors manage to transcend these limitations, but in doing so they cease to be professors, at least in the minds of their colleagues. And in general it seems that it is

easiest to become a policy entrepreneur if your mind has not been clouded by too much knowledge of economic facts or existing economic theories—only then can you be entirely sincere in telling people what they want to hear.

This conception of the sacred and the profane is more than a little disingenuous. Martin Feldstein, the quintessential economics professor, model builder and regression runner, is also among the leading policy entrepreneurs and masters of forensic theorizing. There are dozens of respected academic economists who compose op-ed articles, testify at legislative hearings, commend diverse policies, and still manage to publish in technical economics journals. Oddly though, having made this distinction, Krugman then turns around and aims much of his criticism at fellow economists who are on the professorly side of the divide.

In *Peddling Prosperity*, Krugman briskly debunks Friedman's monetarism, Robert Lucas's rational expectations theory, Martin Feldstein's view of taxes and growth, Murray Weidenbaum's inflated calculation of the costs of regulation, as well as more extreme supply-side claims. But in his critique of conservative economists, Krugman almost obsessively differentiates fellow members of the guild, such as Friedman et al, from the likes of *Wall Street Journal* editorial page editor Robert Bartley and others, whom he dismisses as "cranks." He writes: "Milton Friedman has strong views, and has often clashed with majority opinion in economics; I think that he has



often been wrong, and that he sometimes has been willing to cut corners to win an argument. But nobody would call him a crank. Still less could one use the term to describe Robert Lucas or Martin Feldstein."

Well, let me be the first. Even Nobelists can be cranks. You can be a crank in an op-ed article or in algebra. You can be a crank in a peer-reviewed journal if enough of your peers are cranks. In Krugman's world, if bizarre arguments and extreme views are dressed up in formal models, they pass muster as economic science, even if they turn out to be wildly wrong. Lucas's rational expectations theory, Friedman-style monetarism, Feldstein's unrelenting effort to demonstrate that taxes are a paramount influence on growth rates—Krugman seems to regard these as pretentious crankery, in everything but form and label.

Even more oddly, Krugman warmly invokes Keynes, claiming the great interventionist was right all along and discerning a "sophisticated revival of Keynesianism" in academic economics. As evidence, Krugman cites the work of N. Gregory Mankiw, David Romer, and kindred abstruse New Keynesians. This revival may exist in the more rarified reaches of the academy. Yet Krugman's own counsel on the deficit (cut it) and his insistence that prosperity is effectively out of reach suggest how diluted is his conception of Keynes and how far removed is this putative Keynesian revival from actual policy debate. The century's preeminent policy entrepreneur, after all, was Keynes himself—a vigorous

pamphleteer as well as a high theorist of the full employment that Krugman disparages. With both parties embracing a politics of cutting public outlay, it would be salutary if the academic New Keynesians were more entrepreneurial (and more Keynesian).

**F**ormal economics is a wash in ostensible experts who disagree on the most basic questions of theory and evidence. Krugman himself, almost puckishly, makes great sport at their expense, but always with a respectful disclaimer when the malefactor is a fellow economist. If economists can't be trusted to get political economy right, then maybe other types—sociologists, lawyers, even journalists—deserve a turn. However, Krugman's deepest scorn is reserved for non-economist trespassers and he has a particular animus for those on the moderate left.

His most stinging criticism is directed at Robert Reich. First, a disclaimer of my own: It is no secret that Reich is a co-founder of this magazine, as well as a close friend. I also appear occasionally as a bit player in Krugman's rogues' gallery of non-economist pretenders. So I am not an impartial arbiter of this debate. Yet as one who has argued over the years with Reich on precisely the issues of strategic trade that Krugman addresses, I can report that Krugman egregiously misrepresents Reich's views.

Krugman is contemptuous of advocates of industrial policy and "strategic trade." Industrial policy usually refers to the targeting of certain industries or technologies for public subsidy. Strategic

trade involves the use of quotas, tariffs, market-sharing deals, and similar devices aimed at capturing national advantage. But Krugman sloppily conflates these two distinct policy positions as if they were one and the same, and mischaracterizes the positions of the main protagonists. The reality is that some economists, for example Laura Tyson and Barry Bluestone, are cautious advocates of both industrial policy and strategic trade. However, there are people who support industrial and technology policies aimed at making American industry more globally competitive but oppose managing trade (Robert Solow, James Galbraith) and others who support strategic trade and are skeptical of industrial policy (James Fallows, Clyde Prestowitz). Reich, whose 1982 book with Ira Magaziner, *Minding America's Business*, was a vigorous plea for industrial targeting, has explicitly opposed managed trade. One of Reich's best known (and most controversial) pieces, "Who Is Us?" (*Harvard Business Review*, January-February 1990) is a very pointed critique of managed trade, on the ground that the national identities of multinational businesses are now so scrambled that it is no longer possible to distinguish an "American" firm from, say, a "German" one.

Reich, in the *Harvard Business Review* piece, in several *American Prospect* articles, and in his 1993 book, *The Work of Nations*, not only very directly criticizes managed or strategic trade. He also tempers his earlier advocacy of industrial policy, which he believes has been partly mooted by globalization. In 1992, *The Amer-*



*ican Prospect* published a spirited debate between Reich and Tyson on this very question. Reich's core argument is that the wealth of nations mainly reflects the skills of the workforce. "American ownership of the corporation is profoundly less relevant to America's economic future than the skills, training, and knowledge commanded by American workers—workers who are increasingly employed within the United States by foreign-owned corporations." Even the most cursory reading makes clear that Reich views education and training policy, not activist trade policy, as the long-term source of prosperity.

One can take respectful issue with this view—as I have. It is entirely possible that America needs both a better-trained workforce *and* a more strategic view of trade policy. Japanese multinational firms may be global, but (as even Krugman recognizes) they are still nationalistically Japanese. Prying open the markets of substantially closed economies, even by using temporary quantitative targets as evidence of good faith as in the case of semiconductors, is less "protectionist" than facilitative of freer trade. But this is *my* view—and emphatically not Reich's. Krugman's attacks on Reich are poorly informed and evidently more motivated by his caricature of Reich as non-economist policy promoter than by a careful engagement with Reich's views.

In a recent column in the new Microsoft internet magazine, *Slate*, Krugman excoriates Reich for pressing the issue of economic insecurity: "In the world according to Reich, even well-paid American workers have

now joined the 'anxious classes.' They are liable any day to find themselves downsized out of the middle class. And even if they keep their jobs, the fear of being fired has forced them to accept stagnant or declining wages while productivity and profits soar. Like much of what Reich says, this story is clear, com-

elling, brilliantly packaged, and mostly wrong."

Krugman goes on to debunk the idea of pervasive downsizing, by adding up all the layoffs reported in a recent *Newsweek*, and calculating that they total only 1 worker in 300. He then turns around and attacks Reich for using "anecdotes rather than

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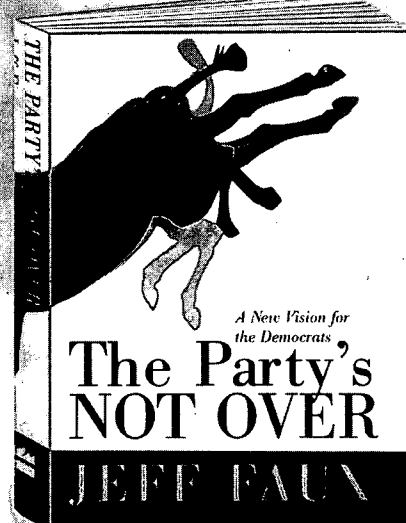
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statistics." This is what psychologists call projection. Krugman cites as an example of a good representative of the Clinton administration—a fully credentialed one who does not play fast and loose with statistics—fellow Stanford economist Joseph Stiglitz, chair of the Council of Economic Advisors and author of a recent report that, in very delicate wording, computed that most newly created jobs were in occupations or industries that had historically paid "above median wages." This, of course, did not mean that the newly created jobs actually paid above-median wages. Stiglitz, threading his way between the administration's need to paint a rosy election-year picture and his own professional integrity, allowed as much. But Krugman blandly asserts, at least for the purposes of sandbagging Reich, that "Both the number of 'good jobs' and the pay that goes with those jobs has been steadily rising." However, in a different context, in *Peddling Prosperity*, Krugman himself writes, "In 1991, the typical family had a real income only 5 percent higher than its 1973 counterpart, and it achieved that income only by working longer hours; most workers were bringing in lower take-home pay than in 1973." This certainly sounds like an anxious class.

Occasionally, as part of his penchant for lobbing little grenades, Krugman capriciously offers an aside that blows away his own previous position, and makes one wonder if he is serious. Having excoriated supporters of industrial policy as economic illiterates, Krugman abruptly declares late in *The Age*

*of Diminished Expectations*, almost as a throwaway line, that "The U.S. government should make a decision to frankly subsidize a few sectors, especially in the high-technology area that may plausibly be described as 'strategic.' . . . Federal expenditures of, say, \$10 billion a year to support industrial R&D consortia would produce at least some benefits."

Ten billion dollars a year! Not even Ira Magaziner in the depths of statist depravity proposed an industrial policy costing ten billion dollars a year. The most eager defenders of DARPA and SEMATECH haven't asked for ten billion dollars a year. After great struggle, the Clinton administration, in 1993, got the U.S. Commerce Department's Advanced Technology Program funded at less than half a billion, and the Republicans killed most of that. Economic heretics, journalists, and lawyers are fools for proposing rather more modest industrial policies, but the Economist pronounces that a nice round ten billion a year seems about right.

A fine example of how Krugman's intuitive solidarity with fellow economists leads him to get the story backwards concerns the Clinton health plan. For Krugman, it is a travesty that non-economist industrial policy advocates such as Reich and Magaziner landed key policy positions in the Clinton administration. Thus predisposed to dislike Magaziner, Krugman recounts this anecdote:

If you had asked most people in the field to list the leading experts on the economics of health care, almost all of them

would have mentioned Henry Aaron of the Brookings Institution, an economist with solid liberal credentials and a strong backer of Clinton during the election. But when the Clinton administration formed its health care task force, a huge effort involving more than five hundred people, Aaron was not involved. Why? The answer appeared to involve a kind of guilt by association. The task force was headed by Ira Magaziner, a business consultant by profession but a strategic trader by inclination. . . . Now, in the great confrontation over industrial policy in 1983 and 1984, economists from Brookings had been highly critical of strategic traders in general and Magaziner in particular. It was not too surprising that Magaziner would exclude a Brookings economist from his deliberations, or even that he would, as appeared to have been the case, have excluded virtually anyone with prior background in health care economics.

Note that this little anecdote, rendered in complex subjunctives, is all inference and surmise, as opposed to reporting. (We journalists may not be too great at running regressions, but we do try to find out what actually took place.) In fact, the Clinton task force did include several health economists, including Professor David Cutler of Harvard. More to the point, Henry Aaron did participate in health policy discussions, both during the campaign and the transition, and made clear his preference for controlling

health costs directly via a cap on hospital revenues, rather than with the "managed competition" approach of the Clinton group. Ironically, the Clinton task force was partial to a more "market-like" approach, which built heavily on the work of the noted health economist Alain Enthoven. Aaron also recalls the notable chilling effect of his December 1992 *New York Times* op-ed piece, describing as "fantasy" the Clintons' claim that cost savings from managed competition would be enough to buy coverage for the uninsured. So the Clinton group and Aaron could not get together because the Clinton model was too much like textbook economics to suit Aaron, while Aaron, despite the Brookings connection, was proposing a form of direct price regulation. Krugman's little story is not just wrong, but wrong in a way that is characteristically Krugman. The only guilt by association is Krugman's own premise—reported as fact—that Magaziner would naturally "exclude a Brookings economist."

### THE PEDDLER

What, finally, is Krugman up to? In *Peddling Prosperity*, he notes that the "policy entrepreneurs," like Reich and Thurow, in contrast to the humble academics, tended to publish "in newspapers and in semi-popular magazines like *Foreign Affairs*, the *Harvard Business Review*, and the *New Republic*." Well, since 1994, Krugman has published six articles in *Foreign Affairs* and two in the *Harvard Business Review*. His latest *Harvard Business Review* piece, "A Corporation Is Not a Country," takes essentially the

same view of the global economy as Robert Reich's "Who is Us?"

In addition, Krugman somehow found the time to write articles for *Foreign Policy*, the *Washington Monthly*, *Fortune*, the *Economist*, *Harper's*, and *U.S. News and World Report*, as well as dozens of newspapers. He has also continued his prodigious scholarly output, having written or edited more than a dozen academic books and textbooks, and dozens more scholarly articles. His column, "The Dismal Scientist," will appear monthly in *Slate* and Krugman has begun appearing in the *New York Times Sunday Magazine*. He also presumably teaches classes.

His latest book, *Pop Internationalism*, published in March, is a collection of articles from *Foreign Affairs*, *Science*, *Scientific American*, the *Wilson Quarterly*, *New Perspectives Quarterly*, and the *American Economic Review*. In these, he continues his fondness for the contrarian view, explaining why competitiveness is "a dangerous obsession," why Asia's economic miracle is largely a myth, why it is important in economics education to "vaccinate the minds of our undergraduates against the misconceptions that are so predominant in what passes for educated discussion about international trade." In his introduction, he embellishes his theme of economic illiterates dominating economic debate, in this case on trade: "Serious discussion of world trade," he warns, has been replaced by "pop internationalism." Krugman has a remedy:

What I eventually realized was that an effective answer to pop

internationalism would require a new kind of writing. I would have to write essays for non-economists that were clear, effective, and even entertaining—otherwise nobody would read them. . . . [T]he target reader was someone who might think he knew a lot about economics but had never been exposed to the real thing. . . . And finally, the essays would have to be *right*—no intellectual cheap shots, because after all, letting the world see what real economic analysis was like was the whole point of the exercise.

So Krugman has become the most prolific policy entrepreneur of them all. He may be peddling fatalism rather than activism, but he is no less a peddler. Alas, Krugman's earlier counsel is correct. It is very difficult to be both a conscientious academic and an effective policy entrepreneur. There aren't enough hours in the day, and you begin to make mistakes. Your own glibness becomes your worst enemy. In his high-professor role, Krugman equates "anecdote" with unscientific. This apparently leads him to conclude that when in anecdotal, policy-entrepreneur mode, you don't need to look things up. And as for intellectual cheap shots, well, you can read him yourself.

There is more than a little projection in Krugman's caricature of policy peddlers. Krugman certainly has every right to publish for a mass audience, as do Thurow, Reich, and the rest of his targets. But he has long since peddled away his right to cast stones. □



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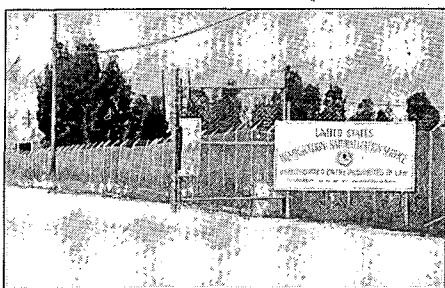


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JACOB HEILBRUNN

# Who Won the Cold War?

**T**he end of the Cold War has not been kind to the American left. As the opening of the Soviet archives has revealed, the Kremlin was, in fact, intent on conquering the globe to carry out a Marxist-Leninist revolution. Even in the United States, Yale University's new "Annals of Communism" series has demolished the revisionist pretensions of a band of New Left scholars who began contending in the 1980s that Moscow's hold over the American Communist Party was never as ironfisted as its foes had claimed.

Despite the efforts of a few redoubts such as the *Nation* to maintain the old faith, the torrent of archival revelations has resulted in a remarkable new genre on the left that might be called confessional journalism. One example came in the form of a March 19 *New York Post* column by Garry Wills, subtitled "It's time for the Left to admit that Richard Nixon was right" about Alger Hiss. Even more surprising, Nicholas von Hoffman, writing in the April 16 *Washington Post*, maintained that "enough new infor-

mation has come to light about the Communists in the U.S. government that we may now say that point by point Joe McCarthy got it all wrong and yet was still closer to the truth

War liberalism. Cold War liberalism played a leading role in the battle against communism when it was enunciated in the late 1940s by policymakers and intellectuals such as George F. Kennan, Walter Lippmann, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., Reinhold Niebuhr, and Daniel Bell. It continued on with figures like Daniel Patrick Moynihan and in the pages of the *Reporter*, *New Leader*, and *New Republic*. Later, the neo-conservatives usurped the traditions of Cold War liberalism and replaced them with illiberalism. Now that the neoconservatives are creating the new historical fiction that they single-handedly won the Cold War, it is all the more urgent to reexamine the saga of American anticommunism.

## WORKS DISCUSSED IN THIS ESSAY:

*Richard Gid Powers*, *Not Without Honor: The History of American Anticommunism* (Free Press, 1995).

*John Ehrman*, *The Rise of Neoconservatism: Intellectuals and Foreign Affairs, 1945-1994* (Yale University Press, 1995).

*Jay Winik*, *On The Brink: The Dramatic, Behind-the-Scenes Saga of the Reagan Era and the Men and Women Who Won the Cold War* (Simon and Schuster, 1996).

*Robert M. Gates*, *From the Shadows: The Ultimate Insider's Story of Five Presidents and How They Won the Cold War* (Simon and Schuster, 1996).

*George F. Kennan*, *At A Century's Ending: Reflections 1982-1995* (Norton, 1996).

than those who ridiculed him."

As might have been expected, the right greeted these mea culpas with a fresh round of Cold War triumphalism. An editorial in Hilton Kramer's *New Criterion*, for instance, concluded that Hoffman's essay "remains historically important as a statement of liberal guilt on the anti-anti-communist issue."

In fact, it was nothing of the kind. Before liberals begin paying homage to McCarthy, they would do well to recall that forgotten in the debate over the left has been another tradition: Cold

## THE ORIGINS OF ANTICOMMUNISM

Richard Gid Powers's *Not Without Honor* represents perhaps the most scholarly statement of the neoconservative case. Powers, a professor of history and the author of a fine biography of Herbert Hoover, traces the course of American anticommunism from the 1919 Red Scare to the rise of American communism in the 1930s to the emergence of neo-

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conservatism in the 1970s. At times, his book resembles an encyclopedia entry when it delves into the anfractuositities of anticommunist movements. Lurking beneath the patina of scholarly reserve, however, is a book with a mission. That mission is to restore honor to the anticommunist tradition that Powers believes has been traduced by the left.

As Powers rightly observes, anticommunism had its origins in World War I in the clash between Leninist world revolution and Wilsonian liberal internationalism. Wilson had hesitated to join an alliance that included the autocratic Czar Nicholas II. After the first Russian revolution of March 1917 resulted in the creation of the democratic Petrograd government, however, Wilson could claim that America's partners were all fit for a "League of Honor." When the Bolsheviks seized power in October and bolted from the entente, Wilson was enraged: Russia, he declared, had become the "Judas of the nations."

For much of the American left, however, the Bolshevik revolution was the glorious revolution. "Powerless at home," writes Powers, "the American radical left was intoxicated with the sense of being part of an international movement that had won the revolution's first victory over the forces of capitalism, militarism, and imperialism." As Soviet communism was born, so was American anticommunism. Enraged by what they viewed as the disloyalty of the left, the young Justice Department lawyer J. Edgar Hoover and his boss, Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer, launched the

1919 Red Scare.

Here Powers introduces his main theme: Anticommunism, sound at the core, was unfairly besmirched by the zealotry of some of its proponents. Throughout, Powers's only concern is the damage that anticommunist excesses may have inflicted upon the cause itself rather than the harm it may have done to innocent individuals. Powers explains that the "most important consequence of Hoover's anticommunist campaign was to create that malevolent stereotype of anticommunism as an unconstitutional conspiracy against the left. After 1920, the history of American anticommunism was being written by its enemies, and myths about anticommunism were overshadowing the reality."

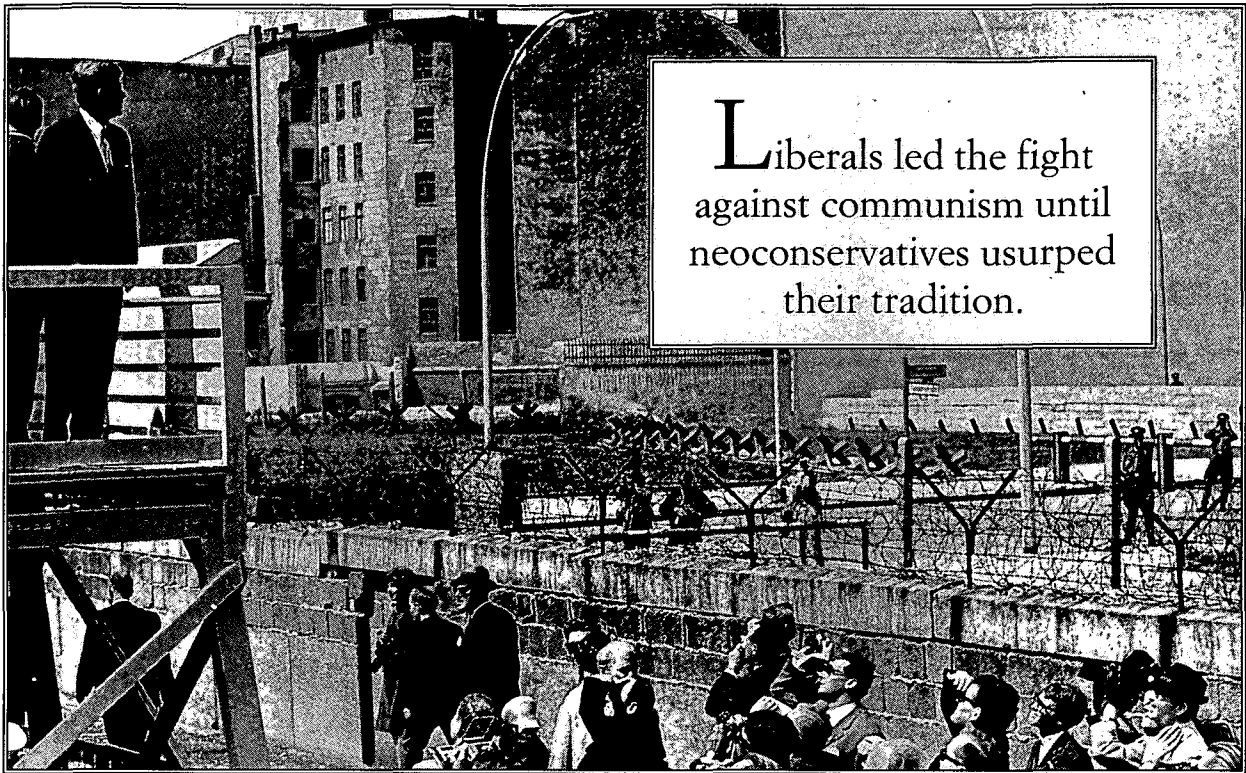
**Y**et Powers's own subsequent depictions of anticommunists in the 1920s do not bear out this assertion. Among the militant anticommunists who enjoyed a high public profile were Abraham Cahan, founder and editor of the *Forward*; Georgetown University educator Edmund Walsh; and George S. Schuyler, who was editor of the country's leading black newspaper, the *Pittsburgh Courier*. Myth did not overshadow reality on their watch. What is more, Powers shows that the '20s spawned numerous conspiracy theories on the right, ranging from the "Spider Web chart," distributed by the American Defense Society, to Nesta Webster's *Secret Societies and Subversive Movements*, which in turn supplied the basis for Pat Robertson's *The New World Order*.

Unfortunately, Powers fails to

mention the role played by Menshevik exiles in shaping American anticommunism. Key figures such as Boris I. Nicolaevsky, the editor of the *New Leader*, and Joseph Shaplen and Simeon Strumsky, both editors at the *New York Times*, worked to counter the pro-Soviet lies disseminated by much of the New York intelligentsia in the 1930s. One can only wonder why Powers fails to devote any attention to the pro-labor *New Leader*, which was one of the most influential anticommunist magazines in the United States in the 1930s and 1940s. Perhaps it is because the *New Leader* and the social democratic Mensheviks helped set the stage for the Cold War liberals.

Powers is on stronger ground in discussing the inroads communism made among American intellectuals in the 1930s. No twist or turn of the Kremlin was too audacious for the popular front movement to follow. For example, after Sidney Hook and John Dewey exposed the fraudulence of the Moscow show trials, Corliss Lamont and 87 other fellow travelers signed an Open Letter to American Liberals declaring that the "demand for an investigation of trials carried on under the legally constituted judicial system of the Soviet Government can only be interpreted as political intervention in the affairs of the Soviet Union with hostile intent."

Though the popular front was smashed on the rock of the 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, Soviet communism's prestige reached its high-water mark during World War II. United States government wartime propaganda transformed



Liberals led the fight against communism until neoconservatives usurped their tradition.

AP/Wide World Photos

Stalin's Russia into a noble ally fighting for the same goals as America's democratic allies. As usual, however, Powers goes overboard in complaining that the "war ended with a Communist Party on the ascendant, and a fellow-traveling left that had perfected the use of the brown smear against an embittered anticommunist community. . . ." The Soviet Union may have been rehabilitated during World War II, but the American Communist Party was not.

### THE RISE OF LIBERAL ANTICOMMUNISM

The compelling story that Powers fails to tell because it would not fit in with his depiction of neoconservatism is the emergence in the late 1940s of a vigorous liberal anticommunism. Alarmed by Soviet aggrandizement in Eastern Europe and the

Middle East, Harry S. Truman, who had himself initially harbored warm feelings toward Stalin, reversed Roosevelt's accommodationist policy toward Stalin. The administration was already in the process of adopting a confrontational policy toward the Soviet Union when George F. Kennan supplied the doctrinal buttressing in his 1946 "Long Telegram" and his July 1947 article in *Foreign Affairs*, which he signed "X." As Kennan observed in his memoirs, the widespread distribution of his essays meant that in official Washington "my voice now carried."

As an obscure junior officer in the Moscow embassy during World War II, Kennan had chafed at FDR's personal diplomacy with Stalin, which he viewed as based on naive and dangerous assumptions about the Soviet dictator's true intentions.

Steeped in realist precepts about power, Kennan was convinced that any postwar order would have to be based on a spheres-of-influence deal rather than a utopian peace with the Kremlin. His "X" article famously called for a "long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies"—whence the term "containment" to describe liberal policy toward the Soviet Union.

Two years later, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.'s *The Vital Center* reiterated the liberal faith in democratic freedoms and offered a coherent and eloquent restatement of the need to confront the communist menace. Schlesinger, along with Reinhold Niebuhr, had already established the Americans for Democratic Action (ADA) as a rival to Henry Wallace's pro-Soviet Progressive Citizens of America. *The Vital*



Center amounted to a programmatic statement for the ADA. Schlesinger announced the arrival of a new New Deal generation free of the ideological baggage that weighed down the left: "History had spared us any emotional involvement in the Soviet mirage." Echoing Kennan's more florid conclusion that the American people ought to feel a "certain gratitude to a Providence" that presented the communist challenge, Schlesinger concluded that communism has "made us reclaim democratic ideas which a decade ago we tended to regret and even to abandon."

If the ADA types had played an important part in staring down the Wallacites in 1947, they also sought to inoculate the American public against the virus of McCarthyism. Daniel Bell, Richard Hofstadter, Peter Viereck, and other leading intellectuals sought to examine the rise of what they called the "paranoid style" in their landmark *The Radical Right* (1954). Hofstadter and Bell argued that the rise of the radical right was largely the product of "status anxiety" and concluded that an indiscriminate anticommunism could snuff out the very liberties it professed to protect. In Powers's hands, these insights get transmogrified into a putative "Adorno-Hofstadter-Bell theory" that McCarthyism and anticommunism were both irrational forces. But perhaps even Powers may look with a kindlier eye on the idea of a "paranoid style" on the right in light of the recent revelations about militia activity in Arizona and elsewhere.

By the late 1950s, a few liberals, such as the founding father

of historical revisionism, William Appleman Williams, began to blame the United States for the Cold War. Had the United States, so the argument went, catered to Soviet sensitivities and apprehensions, the Cold War might never have begun. The Vietnam War gave credibility to the idea that the United States played the provocative role.

Vietnam was, of course, the great failure of Cold War liberalism. A moralistic self-confidence, which had its sources in the Kennedy administration's insistence on bearing any price for freedom, ended up plunging the United States into the jungles of Vietnam. Not until mainstream liberals such as Eugene McCarthy joined the antiwar movement did liberalism begin to divorce itself from the war. It was liberals, not conservatives, who finally recognized that the war was a disaster, and liberals rather than radicals who finally turned public opinion against it. But liberals had already inflicted a body blow to liberalism by dismissing the realist precepts of power as the fundamental ingredient in international relations. By confusing a peripheral with a vital American interest, junior Wise Men such as Dean Rusk and Robert McNamara ended up squandering the patrimony their elders had bequeathed them.

The result was nothing less than the intellectual collapse of the anticommunist consensus and its replacement by a more highly polarized left and right. One of the prime culprits was, in fact, Norman Podhoretz's *Commentary*, which was the first highbrow journal to begin running Cold War revisionist articles

by the historians Staughton Lynd and H. Stuart Hughes. Podhoretz himself summarized the results of his September 1967 symposium "Liberal Anti-Communism Revisited" by observing, "Virtually all seem to agree that the American effort to contain Communism by military means cannot be justified either politically or morally in the double context of a polycentric Communist world and an unstable underdeveloped world seething with nationalist aspirations." In 1972, when George McGovern captured the Democratic presidential nomination, his adversaries charged that isolationism and anti-anticommunism appeared to have displaced liberal internationalism in the Democratic Party.

By that time, what might be called a counter-counterestablishment had begun to coalesce. Alarmed by the turn of black radicals against Israel during the 1967 war as well as the publishing threat posed by the appearance of the leftist *New York Review of Books*, *Commentary* moved back to anticommunism. "One man," Powers tell us, "summoned the will, the strength, and the imagination to commence the giant task of rebuilding the anticommunist coalition. This was Norman Podhoretz. . . ."

At this point the reader will do well to close Powers's elephantine book with a sigh and turn to John Ehrman's *The Rise of Neoconservatism*. Ehrman, a lecturer in history at George Washington University, writes in a lively and engaging manner. His book seeks to chronicle the



impact on American foreign policy of Cold War liberals-turned-neoconservatives and offers a particularly penetrating account of Daniel Patrick Moynihan's intellectual odyssey. Though Ehrman does go astray at a few points, it is something of a relief to discover history rather than hagiography.

Initially, Podhoretz and his allies in the crusade against the New Left did not think of themselves as any shade of conservative. And they weren't. They were liberal anticommunists who looked upon the New Deal welfare state with approval. Their presidential candidate was Senator Henry M. Jackson. Like Jackson, they viewed both the left and right with misgivings, attacking Henry Kissinger's detentist brand of realpolitik as defeatist and indifferent to human rights. Some of the old-line liberal writers who joined Podhoretz were Irving Kristol, Ben Wattenberg, Penn Kemble, Midge Decter, Jeane Kirkpatrick, Theodore Draper, Walter Goodman, Seymour Martin Lipset, Walter Laqueur, Robert W. Tucker, Roger Starr, and Nathan Glazer.

Perhaps the most influential figure was Moynihan, who first gained notoriety in 1965 with the release of an internal government report he had written about the decline of two-parent black families and a decade later caught the public spotlight as Gerald Ford's ambassador to the United Nations. Moynihan was the first U.N. ambassador to use the General Assembly as a pulpit from which to become a media star. The duty of American liberals, Moynihan argued, was to

resist the depredations of Third World communist regimes: "It is on the Democratic Left that we are most likely to find both informed and unintimidated advocates of a vigorous American role in world affairs, and equally unashamed partisans of American performance."

After Jimmy Carter defeated Henry M. Jackson in the 1976 Democratic primaries, the neoconservatives turned to Moynihan as their standard-bearer. At first, Moynihan seemed to fulfill the hopes the neoconservatives reposed in him. He decried the Carter administration's failure of nerve in confronting the Soviet Union and its Third World client states. Unlike his fellow neoconservatives, Moynihan, however, refused to abandon the center for the right. Quite the contrary. Moynihan, who sensed that the Soviet empire was coming apart at the seams, began to attack Reagan administration nuclear arms policy. Others such as Theodore Draper had already distanced themselves from the increasingly shrill edge of neoconservatism and returned to writing for the *New York Review of Books*. Podhoretz simply kept moving to the right: a resurrection of detente, he warned in 1980, "would signify the final collapse of an American resolve to resist the forward surge of Soviet imperialism" leading to nothing less than "the Findlandization of America." As Ehrman astutely observes, the neoconservatives "had hoped to find a new Truman to rally around, a Democrat to promote their liberal ideas at home while fighting the Cold War abroad. Not find-

ing one, they embraced the Republican party and Ronald Reagan as the best alternative."

## REAGAN AND THE NEOCONSERVATIVES

Jay Winik is the court historian of neoconservatives and the Reagan era. This is not necessarily a crippling handicap. *On the Brink* does contain much inside information on the role that neoconservatives played in the early years of the Reagan administration. Winik shrewdly notes that they formed a new counterestablishment and reveals the inner workings of the various Cold War organizations of the neoconservatives.

Unfortunately, Winik, who worked at the Coalition for a Democratic Majority, has taken Walter Isaacson's and Evan Thomas's *The Wise Men* as his model. His book shares the flaws of *The Wise Men* but lacks its stylistic sheen. *On the Brink* teeters precipitously as the narrative progresses. It lacks a context and suffers from a dutiful tone as it attempts to tell the story of the end of the Cold War through four figures: Richard Perle, Elliot Abrams, Jeane Kirkpatrick, and Max Kampelman. In his zeal to imitate *The Wise Men*, Winik devotes such minute attention to his characters that the reader may, for example, come away knowing more about Perle's culinary tastes than about the details of arms-control negotiations. Nor does Winik grapple with the ideas that Kirkpatrick espoused, such as her distinction between authoritarian and totalitarian regimes or her Moynihanian performance at the

U.N. Instead, Winik devotes excessive time to such minor figures as Max Kampelman, transforming them into Periclean statesmen though they cannot possibly bear the narrative weight that he places upon them. Surprisingly, Winik makes scarcely any reference to Reagan and his senior advisers; Caspar Weinberger and William Casey play mere walk-on parts. To be sure, Winik concludes that "ultimately, the vision and the triumph decisively belong to Reagan and his counterestablishment." But Reagan might well ask, where's the rest of me? In Winik's rendering, the neoconservatives were the main actors.

**R**obert Gates will have none of this. Gates, who was director of the CIA from 1991 to 1993, has spent a lifetime in Washington, D.C., working either in the CIA or on the National Security Council (NSC). At first glance, his book might appear to be an exercise in self-exculpation masquerading as memoir. Nothing could be further from the truth. Gates may have been trained to keep secrets, but he has drawn on his three decades of government service to write a cracking good read. He keeps his eye firmly trained on the main characters and offers a potent antidote to the neoconservative version of the Cold War.

Though Gates is concerned to defend the overall record of the CIA, he admits that it completely failed to foresee the massive Soviet effort to surpass the United States in strategic missile numbers and capabilities. This Soviet effort became the basis for

attacks on detente by the right. The fear was that detente was permitting the Soviet Union to gain a first-strike capability—that is, the means to wipe out enough of the American land-based missile force so that retaliation would be suicide. Yet Gates contends that the picture was more complicated: The American military buildup that did take place beginning in the mid-1970s was achieved only because new arms were sold to a hostile Congress as future bargaining chips: "It would be one of history's little ironies that detente—flawed in so many ways—would play a major role in saving America's strategic modernization programs."

Another target of the right was the 1975 Helsinki Declaration on human rights signed by the Ford administration. Conservatives saw any agreements with communists as a sellout—"Jerry, don't go" editorialized the *Wall Street Journal*—but, as Gates notes, it turned out to be the Soviets who committed a historic blunder. By signing the Helsinki Declaration, the Soviet Union and its East European satellites legitimized the efforts of their own citizens and the West to push for human rights inside the Iron Curtain. Gates has it right: "The Soviets desperately wanted CSCE [the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe], they got it, and it laid the foundations for the end of their empire. We resisted it for years, went grudgingly, Ford paid a terrible price for going—perhaps reelection itself—only to discover years later that CSCE had yielded benefits to us beyond out

wildest imagination. Go figure."

**I**ndeed, in Gates's telling, Jimmy Carter emerges as one of the heroes of the Cold War. Gates, who served on Carter's NSC under Zbigniew Brzezinski, devotes much of his memoir to redressing the image of Carter as a weakling who failed to stand up to the Soviets. Gates argues that Carter's efforts to promote human rights, support dissidents, and stir up nationalities went far beyond presidential rhetoric. Early in the administration, says Gates, Brzezinski initiated, and Carter approved, an unprecedented White House effort to attack the internal legitimacy of the Soviet government. Gates writes: "Carter had, in fact, changed the long-standing rules of the Cold War. Through his human rights policies, he became the first president since Truman to challenge directly the legitimacy of the Soviet government in the eyes of its own people. . . . The Soviet leaders knew the implications for them of what Carter was doing, and hated him for it." What Gates overlooks, of course, is that Carter's incessant vacillation between the Vance and Brzezinski wings of his foreign policy team created an atmosphere in which the Soviet Union could invade Afghanistan with impunity. Carter's inability to reconcile the tensions among foreign policy advisors haunted him during his failed re-election bid in 1980.

Whatever Carter's rhetoric on defense spending, he continued the strategic modernization program for the air-launched cruise missile, the MX, and completed the MIRVing of Minuteman missiles and the Trident ballistic

missile submarine. In addition, Carter made another crucial move that contributed to the demise of the Soviet empire: the decision to place medium-range missiles in Western Europe should the Soviet Union fail to remove or curtail the new SS-20 missiles it was stationing in Eastern Europe. Gates concludes that "the perception of new U.S. strategic power and strength that emerged in the first half of the 1980s as new weapons were built and deployed was, in fact, Ronald Reagan reaping the harvest sown by Nixon, Ford, and Carter" (emphasis in original).

Gates is also at pains to show that Carter relied on covert action to counter Soviet encroachments into the Third World. Perhaps Gates is exaggerating the extent of Carter's role in signing presidential findings in order to legitimize the Reagan administration's later forays into Central America, but he does show that Carter ordered covert action in Afghanistan, Nicaragua, Grenada, and El Salvador. According to Gates, the "CIA ended up as the administration's primary weapon in trying to cope with Soviet and Cuban aggression in the Third World and as an important asset in challenging Soviet abuses at home."

Under the Reagan administration, the role of the CIA became even more central as William Casey developed an entire independent foreign policy at the Langley compound. Gates calls the CIA "Reagan's sword." Casey swung it with abandon. As Gates notes, Casey modeled himself on the swashbuckling World War I hero William J. Donovan. Donovan, who had created the

precursor of the CIA, the OSS, had also been an Irishman and a Wall Street lawyer. "The preeminent place on Casey's office wall as DCI [Director of Central Intelligence]," writes Gates, "was reserved for an autographed black-and-white photograph of Donovan. You couldn't go in or out without seeing it. He couldn't move without passing it." The only question was whether methods appropriate to fighting the Nazis were applicable to combating the evil empire.

As Casey's machinations in Central America helped lead to the Iran-contra scandal, the consequences of those methods could be dire. So cavalier was Casey about running the CIA that Gates reports that when Brzezinski, long since out of office, complained that funding had been cut off for a favorite project in Poland, Casey simply asked how much it would take to remedy the problem. "About \$18,000," Brzezinski replied. Later that day a man showed up at Brzezinski's office without an appointment and handed him a briefcase full of cash, which a nonplussed Brzezinski passed on to a visiting Pole associated with the project. "This," Gates writes, "was indicative of Casey's penchant for 'action this day.'"

**B**y the mid-1980s, however, the hard-liners had outlived their usefulness. Reagan, who had started out political life as a New Deal liberal, came full circle. As the superpower that had initiated the Cold War ended it—for it was the Soviet Union, not the Soviet Union and the United States, that had divided Europe—Reagan

astutely reached out to Gorbachev. Gates quotes Henry Kissinger as observing about Gorbachev during a fall 1989 CIA briefing, "If you were setting out to destroy the Soviet Union, would you do it any differently?"

For most neoconservatives and conservatives, however, Gorbachev was simply another nefarious communist carrying out a gigantic deception. The new Soviet overtures meant that the Kremlin had become even more sophisticated at lulling the West into a false sense of security. In a stunning error, Podhoretz decried Reagan administration policies as "appeasement by any other name," even though it was Gorbachev who ended up appeasing Reagan and Bush. As Ehrman observes, "[A]lthough Podhoretz was not the only foreign policy commentator overtaken by events and quickly confused, his long record of strident statements marked by a tone of absolute certainty left him with little cover for his misinterpretations."

Among the magazines that engaged in the battles of the Cold War, the *New Leader*, *New Republic*, and *New York Review of Books* recognized that fundamental changes were taking place in the Soviet empire. The only neoconservative magazine that emerged from the Cold War with a new sense of mission was the *National Interest*, whose brilliant editor, Owen Harries, advocated classical realist principles. And in retrospect, the sometime neoconservative who comes off looking good is Moynihan, who has observed in his sprightly 1993 book *Pandaemonium* that during his early service in the Senate he

came to realize that his former allies "wished for a military posture approaching mobilization; they would create or invent whatever crisis were required to bring this about."

**A**s George F. Kennan notes in his beautifully rendered *At A Century's Ending*, there was a widespread belief among hard-liners during the Cold War that the Soviet system had reduced entire peoples to a permanent state of abject and cowering subordination. Kennan knew better. He observes, "Political systems supporting great personal tyrannies, such as those of Hitler, Stalin, and Mao, share in the mortality of the tyrant himself. They become the victims of—in effect, the participants in—his illnesses, his aging, and his death." With his sensitivity to European culture, Kennan was also acutely aware that the division of Europe itself was a historical aberration and could not last. Indeed, in a 1987 address in Berlin (included in his new book), Kennan prophetically concluded, "I have not lost hope that I may yet see the day when this city can again breathe a normal breath and resume its place among the great cultural centers of Germany, of Europe, and of the world." It has, and he has.

For Kennan's neoconservative critics, that day could never arrive; tyranny wouldn't simply die. On the contrary, they harbored a certain contempt for liberal democracy, exemplified in Jean-Francois Revel's *How Democracies Perish*. Rather than being a source of political endurance, liberalism seems to

them synonymous with weakness. This strain of illiberalism, as John Patrick Diggins has observed in *Up From Communism* (1975), was always present among intellectuals such as Will Herberg and James Burnham who, whether from the left or right, always held "liberalism responsible for all that had gone wrong in the modern world."

Now, in the post-Cold War era neoconservatives such as Irving Kristol have taken up the sword against the liberal tradition they once upheld. The real Cold War, Kristol has declared in the pages of the *National Interest*, is just beginning on the domestic front against liberalism itself. Contrary to popular belief, the ideological odyssey of the neoconservatives suggests that, far from coopting conservatism, they have been coopted by it. *Commentary* has been reduced to running articles on the "Deniable Darwin," while the *Weekly Standard*, run by two members of the neoconservative peerage, William Kristol and John Podhoretz, attempts to mainstream conservatism. As the Gingrich forces remake the Republican Party, neoconservatism itself will most likely end up as a footnote in future histories of the Cold War, a relic of old battles as obscure as the struggles over the true nature of the Trinity in the waning days of the Roman empire.

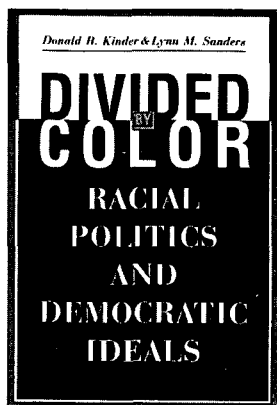
**I**n *The Rise of Neoconservatism*, Ehrman concludes that intellectuals such as *Foreign Affairs* editor Fareed Zakaria "signaled the ascendancy of a new generation

of thinkers who could take over from Tucker, Kirkpatrick, and the other neoconservative leaders of the 1970s and 1980s. . . . [I]t appears there will be a renewal of neoconservative foreign policy thinking in the mid-1990s." This is mistaken. Writers on foreign policy such as Zakaria and Michael Lind, who could have created a revival of neoconservatism, are in fact traditional realists, while the former neoconservatives are searching for new crusades. There are exceptions such as Jeane Kirkpatrick, who has moved towards realism and remains the most penetrating and shrewd of the neoconservative writers. But consider William Kristol and Robert Kagan's "Toward a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy" in the July-August 1994 *Foreign Affairs*, which calls upon a President Dole to add \$80 billion to the defense budget and to "educate the citizenry" about the virtues of the military.

For President Clinton the failure of the Republican Party to go beyond warmed-over Reaganism presents a second chance. In his first term, Clinton spurned hard-nosed Democrats such as Samuel Huntington who signed a foreign policy statement in the *New York Times* supporting his candidacy against George Bush. The war in Bosnia, however, has now created the basis for a new Democratic consensus on foreign policy as the Vietnam syndrome has faded before the specter of ethnic genocide. In a second term, Clinton could do worse than work to create a new vital center that steers a course between the Charybdis of left-wing isolationism and the Scylla of right-wing jingoism.□



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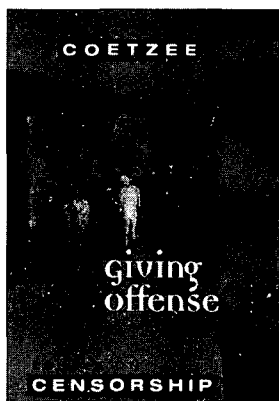
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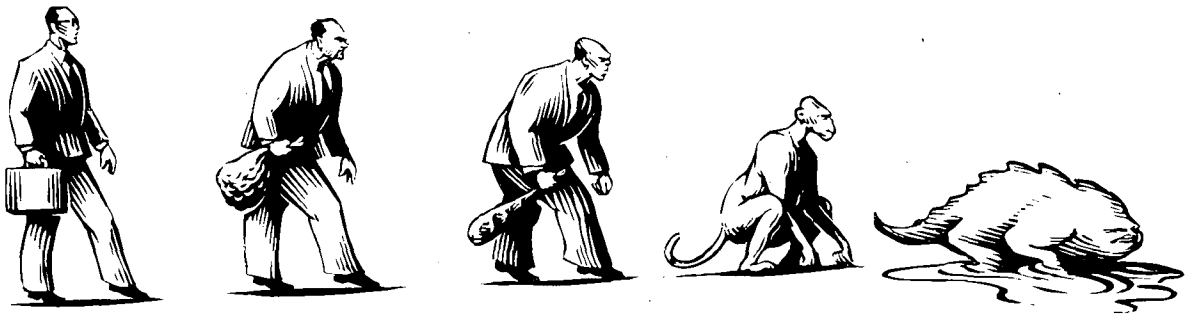
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## THE CASE FOR POVERTY

The Census Bureau reports that the gap between rich and poor is the widest it's been since World War II, but according to Ernest Van Den Haag, writing in op-ed pages of the *Wall Street Journal*, that's no cause for concern. Such inequality "is economically beneficial" because it creates an incentive to work hard and avoid poverty. If government acts to raise wages on the bottom of the income scale, Van Den Haag warns, people would have little reason to work hard, take risks, and invest their extra wealth.

We expect that in future essays Van Den Haag will be coming out strongly for hunger, because, with his ruthless economic logic, he can show that it stirs people to work harder to avoid starvation. No doubt unemployment is good for the same reason; many others have argued as much. It's quite wonderful that anything bad is actually good because the prospect of bad things is what makes people work hard. Professor Van Den Haag, meet Dr. Pangloss.

## A NEW TAKE ON FEMINISM

According to Kate O'Beirne, Washington editor of the *National Review*, women are more likely to vote Democrat because they just aren't as smart when it comes to politics. (As Dave Barry would say, we swear we are not making this up.) "It may not be in women's nature to care very much about politics," writes O'Beirne, a woman who somehow manages to write regularly on politics. She strongly implies in her article that women's views might become more sensible—from a conservative perspective, that is—if they just paid more attention to the news.

While conceding that women are more concerned than men about the poor, the federal safety net, and education, O'Beirne argues, "they are not nearly as knowledgeable as men on these issues they claim to care about." Her proof? A little-known survey that shows "Men are more likely to know the size of the national budget, the unemployment rate, and the level of federal education spending," she says, without mentioning just how many men know the answer to such arcane

budgetary issues. If the National Organization of Women ever forms its own third party, she sneers, it ought to be called "the Know Nothings."

No doubt O'Beirne and the other *Review* editors expect that once women gain more knowledge, they'll see the light and embrace a hard-right agenda. They'll presumably become strong supporters of Republican efforts to slash Medicare benefits, reduce government support for low-income women and children, cut federal education benefits, and freeze the minimum wage—all signs, the editors apparently believe, of high intelligence and self-interested voting. Still, we give O'Beirne some credit: Despite her derision of female voters, she stopped short of calling for repeal of the 19th Amendment, which granted women the right to vote: We wouldn't be surprised, though, that if conservatives continue to lag among women voters, the notion of such a repeal will acquire some appeal to the Tories at *The National Review*.

—Art Levine



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